



Philip Selwood obtains the post of Resident Surgical Registrar through the patronage of his prospective father-in-law, Sir Arthur Benson-Gray. At the same time as Philip, Dr. Mola, a Spanish émigré, enters the service of the hospital as an anæsthetist. Philip strikes up an acquaintance with Dr. Mola and gradually, against his better judgment, finds himself being drawn into the fantastic private affairs of the little Spaniard. In a final débâcle, the whirlpool of Mola's fortunes sucks Philip under, but before he goes down he catches a revealing glimpse of his surroundings.



# THE PACK



*Books by John Rowan Wilson*

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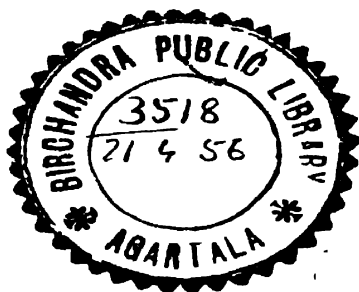
A BED OF THORNS  
THE PACK

# THE PACK

*A Novel*

BY

JOHN ROWAN WILSON



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**To  
SHEILA**



**‘For God shall bring every work unto judgement,  
with every secret thing, whether it be good, or  
whether it be evil.’**

**ECCLESIASTES**



# **Part I**





## *Chapter One*

PHILIP SELWOOD SAT UNCOMFORTABLY ON A COUCH in the main hall of the Royal College of Surgeons, and waited. The couch was a decorative piece in the French Empire style, not really meant for sitting on at all, and he occupied it, for the moment, alone—the other thirty-five occupants of the hall were far too agitated even to stand still, let alone be seated. For all his efforts to control it, his nervousness was as great as theirs. Involuntarily, his eyes kept moving alternately to his watch and to a piece of paper on the portable notice-board. The paper said that it was hoped to announce the results of the examination for the Diploma of Fellow at approximately five-thirty.

Philip looked round the hall with some disfavour. He had never felt at ease in the College. It was pervaded by an atmosphere of chilly solemnity, like the tabernacle of some obscure yet prosperous modern religion. Outside the marble pillars at its entrance stood the limousines of its high priests, and the commissionaires guarding its doors were deferential but knowing, as befitted those who had lived always in contact with men of eminence. Only these servants seemed to have any kinship with the building. From the medical men who nominally controlled it the College, as it were, stood apart, watching, judging, mercilessly assessing their importance in the context of history.

Through the groups of flushed, chattering men a girl threaded her way towards Philip's corner. She was tall and dark and well-dressed. Her face was handsome in a slightly severe fashion, her figure good, her clothes beauti-

fully tailored. She moved with an impatient grace, unconscious of the interest she aroused as she passed.

She sat down beside Philip on the couch. "I went into the office," she said, "and asked the assistant secretary. She told me they always run about half an hour late. It varies according to how many borderline cases there are."

Philip gave a little grunt. He was quite beyond making any attempt to behave gracefully. Perhaps he was one of the borderline cases, perhaps they were discussing him at this very moment, weighing the evidence, mentally tossing a coin. . . . Then the Chairman of the Court of Examiners would say: "No—somehow—I think not——" and the number seventy-eight would be erased from the list.

He suddenly stood up. "I can't stand this much longer," he said.

He looked around for somewhere to go—anywhere, so long as it should be out of the hall. The indignity of his position tormented him. He regarded the other candidates with disgust. Their faces pale and anxious, they sweated in their correctly professional blue suits on this hot summer day. Some talked, nervously, explosively, recounting their experiences and bragging of their triumphs. Others stood against the wall, eyes half-closed, undergoing solitary, retrospective agony. Philip turned to the girl by his side.

"If only they were a younger crowd," he said resentfully. "We're like a lot of schoolboys waiting outside the headmaster's study. And some of these chaps look close on forty."

"It shouldn't be long now," she said. "They've had their extra half-hour."

"They can keep us as long as they like," he complained peevishly. "One thing's certain—we shan't go away."

He was filled with an unreasonable hatred of his companions in misfortune. "It's like being on a liner in a rough

sea. The chaps standing by themselves are trying not to be sick. And the others are all telling each other they don't feel a thing—nothing they like so much as a good blow. For God's sake let's go outside."

"You don't want to miss them calling out the numbers."

"We can stay within earshot."

They moved out of the hall into the corridor leading to the lecture theatre. In one corner of the hall a bar was being set up. After the results it would be opened, for use by the candidates and examiners. In fact, only the few successful candidates ever remained to drink in the College. For the rest, there were quieter and more comforting bars around the corner, where the atmosphere was not so reminiscent of defeat, and where they could lick their wounds in company with their fellow-unfortunates. Afterwards they would retire dully to their homes or hotels, their heads aching, their appetite for dinner drowned in disappointment, their tongues furred with the smoke of innumerable cigarettes. In six months' time most of them would appear again. The faces in the Examination Hall would be hardly changed. A few would have passed or given up in despair, a few new faces would replace them. The total number remained remarkably constant.

In the corridor it was a little quieter. A group of overseas students resident in the College, Indians, Nigerians, Soudanese, stood gossiping by the notice-boards. The hall porter sat impassively by the door, reading the evening paper. On the wall hung the portraits of past presidents, heavily conventional in style. Successive artists, too much impressed by the dignity of their sitters, had managed to endow them all with a common expression of self-satisfied arrogance, as well as imposing physical features of dubious authenticity. Their pictured appearance was greatly at variance with that of the present-day examiners as known to

Philip—so many of these were small, untidy, and bespectacled. One thing alone they shared with the portraits, an aura of self-confidence of a high degree.

Philip and Pamela found a bench at the end of the corridor, and there they waited. Philip was gratefully aware of the comfort he derived from her presence. With Pamela he could talk if he wished to talk, be silent when he had nothing to say. He could give vent to his anxiety when the mood came upon him, or discuss other matters in the pretence that he was cool and detached, that his mind was not fixed exclusively on his possibilities of success or failure. In this hour of trial her behaviour was irreproachable. She was interested and sympathetic, yet never too sympathetic, never cloying. She realised that victory could not be guaranteed, and that defeat should be shrugged off as a tiresome delay rather than be given the quality of tragedy. With her there was no need to make explanations or excuses. The difficulties and anxieties of his career were no secret from her; she had lived with them since childhood. She seemed not in the least overawed by the sombre magnificence of the College. It was as if hereditary privilege made her a part of all that it signified, more so than any mere professional qualification.

It was significant of her understanding that she had never even asked Philip for his own estimate of his chances. They both knew that such estimates were always valueless. The examination was so long, its episodes following on one another with such bewildering swiftness, that the total effect was one of utter confusion. The final stages were like a nightmare, in which a series of examiners, sometimes genial, sometimes irritable, sometimes (and most disturbingly) quite impassive, presented problems, handed specimens and asked questions interminably, so that the answers in time became no longer a product of thought but pure

reflex action. At this stage, Philip became afflicted with a sense of hopelessness. All his years of work, the final months of cramming—the exclusive and costly course of instruction on which Sir Arthur Benson-Gray had managed to procure a place for him—all the advantages accruing to him from these were being lost through sheer fatigue, in what was as much a test of endurance as of knowledge. At the back of his mind were mistakes he had made, whose magnitude he could not assess because he could not bear to think about them. In any case, all such speculations were useless. He would know soon enough.

Pamela tugged at his sleeve. She was looking at one of the portraits.

“Why, that’s Uncle Roddie!”

“Who?”

“You know—Lord Roderick. That’s his portrait over there, done when he was President.”

“He wasn’t your uncle, surely?”

“No, he was my godfather. But I always called him uncle—you know how children do.”

“You knew him well?”

“As a child only. He died when I was at school. But before that he was always around the house.”

Philip glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. She was looking at the portrait with simple, unaffected interest. She was not showing off. Of course, when one thought of it, there was no reason why Roderick should not have been her godfather—Sir Arthur Benson-Gray was well known to have been a personal friend as well as a colleague of Roderick’s and would be only too likely to select him as a patron for his only daughter. Nevertheless, Philip could not help being impressed by her connection with such grandeur. Not for the first time, he marvelled at his own good fortune. That the girl he was in love with should be so assured, so

darkly handsome, was in itself a source of continuous satisfaction to him. That she should be at the same time the daughter of Sir Arthur Benson-Gray was more than any man had a right to expect. The additional connection with Roderick was almost going too far.

They went closer to the picture. It showed a man of sixty, fleshy and heavy-featured, with narrow eyes and a thick, sensual mouth. Making all allowances for tactful exaggeration on the part of the artist, it gave nevertheless the impression of immense force and vitality. The jaw was square, the shoulders athletic, the hands, clasped together on the folds of the purple gown, were by no means the long tapering extremities so beloved of the novelist. They were strong, broad, smooth, and beautifully cared for. Philip had never seen Roderick in life. He knew him only as a part of the tradition, a name on the title-page of books, the subject of anecdotes both reverential and scurrilous. Here in the College Roderick was but one of a line of great men now dead and gone, but in his own provincial town he was a figure of history. His shadow had fallen, not over an institution alone, but over a whole city. With indefatigable energy he had laboured to make himself into far more than a surgeon of international reputation. He had been in turn, and with varying success, a politician, a reformer, a propagandist, and a patron of the arts. Even now, ten years after his death, the Graftondale Royal Infirmary, though one of the largest provincial teaching hospitals in the country, owed much of its reputation to its association with this one great figure. As an institution, it had a certain local prestige of its own. Known throughout the length and breadth of the county simply as 'The Royal', it had a long and creditable history. But Roderick, while he lived, had given it something more. He had made it into one of the great European centres of surgery.

"He must have been quite a man to know," said Philip.

"Yes," Pamela said vaguely. "I suppose he was."

Suddenly the hum of conversation died. A small, middle-aged man in a grey suit, holding a sheet of paper in his hand, had appeared at the bottom of the great staircase, and from this focal point a wave of silence spread throughout the hall and into the corridor. Philip felt the perspiration breaking out on the palms of his hands, a sensation of nausea in the pit of his stomach.

"Do they read out all the numbers?" asked Pamela.

"No. Just the ones who pass."

They walked to the archway leading into the hall. It was blocked with people and they could see nothing. Philip felt a quiver of impotent hatred against the authors of all this misery and suspense. It was unbearable that they should torture him in this fashion. Then this was lost in a sudden blind panic that he had forgotten his number. They might read it out and he would never know, he would go away and they would erase his name, and forget. . . . He fumbled in his pocket and took a further look at his card. Yes, there it was—seventy-eight.

As if at a great distance, the voice began to read, very slowly and clearly.

"Results of the Final Fellowship Examination," it announced. "The candidates examined today were numbered from fifty-five to ninety. The following are the numbers of the successful entrants."

The voice paused for a moment.

"Fifty-seven!"

A figure moved out of the crowd and walked, with admirable composure, up the staircase. There was a burst of clapping. Then the silence descended again.

"Sixty-four!"

Another burst of applause with, as a sort of counter-



point, a sigh of disappointment on behalf of numbers fifty-eight to sixty-three.

"Sixty-five!"

"Seventy!"

The applause was becoming more perfunctory. A few disconsolate figures began to sidle out of the hall towards the cloak-room. Pamela gripped Philip by the hand.

"Seventy-seven!"

At that moment Philip felt the complete abandonment of all hope. He was defeated by the rules of chance. Two consecutive numbers were rare enough under any circumstances. For such a thing to happen twice in one afternoon was blankly impossible.

"Seventy-eight!"

He heard Pamela's gasp of relief and then felt her hand nudging him forward as he stood fixed in astonishment. He forced his way through the crowd towards the staircase and walked up. He heard the sound of the clapping and, as he reached the top, the voice of the secretary calling the next number. All the way up the staircase and on the landing at the top it was dark and gloomy, as if the sun had never been known to penetrate there, yet to Philip it appeared positively festive. Even the portraits seemed to smile at him benignly. On the landing were his five predecessors, their composure abandoned, talking and laughing wildly in the extremity of their delight. One of them slapped him on the back.

"Congratulations! How many times?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"How many shots have you had? This is my fourth. I thought I was never going to get it."

"Oh, I see." Philip said deprecatingly: "This is my first time."

"Christ!" He turned to the others in admiration. "Do you hear that, chaps? A virgin!"

Philip was introduced to the others. They were all acquainted with one another from previous encounters. Only one more candidate came up the stairs and he was congratulated in turn. Then they waited outside the door of the library.

Presently the door opened and they were led in by the secretary. The candidates stood in line facing a long table, behind which sat the examiners. The chairman stood up and gave a short address. Then the examiners left their seats and passed one by one down the line of the new Fellows, shaking them by the hand. Their faces were benign, almost fatherly. It seemed extraordinary to Philip that he could ever have thought of them as adversaries, exerting every effort to pull him down. The agony of the day now appeared to him as a salutary experience, an ordeal necessary to pick out those fitted for survival, and a fitting prelude to initiation into such an august and exclusive society. One of the examiners, as he passed by, smiled ironically at Philip, as if amused by his obvious air of satisfaction.

"Feels good, does it?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," Philip smiled back.

"Well, hold on to it. It lasts about three months, as a rule."

The examiners left. The candidates signed the roll and gave their names and addresses to the secretary.

Afterwards they went down to the hall again. There was a cluster of people round the bar. Among them Philip noticed Pamela; she was standing near the mantelpiece talking to a small, dark, middle-aged man. As the man turned towards him, Philip recognised the examiner who had spoken to him upstairs.

"Ah, here he is," said the examiner. "The hero of the day. Have a drink."

"You've met Mr. Davidson, haven't you, Philip?"

"Just a few moments ago."

"Pamela's an old friend of mine," explained Davidson. "When I first met her I was a poor struggling devil like yourself, living in hospital. Sir Arthur used to ask me up to the house for a square meal every now and then." He handed Philip a glass of sherry. "What are you going to do now? Paint the town red?"

"I hadn't really thought of it."

"I know," said Davidson sympathetically. "It seems like bad luck, doesn't it, to count on it beforehand?"

"I suppose we'd better ring up Father, before anything else," said Pamela.

"Yes, I should think so." Davidson drained his glass. "Give him my regards, won't you. Tell him we don't see him down here nearly often enough. And the best of luck to you both."

When he had left them Pamela squeezed Philip's hand. "Congratulations, darling. You know how I feel about it, don't you."

Philip looked at her fondly. "This must have been a rotten day for you."

"Much worse for you."

"Absolute hell. But it doesn't matter now."

"Of course not. Now you've got it, it just makes it a better thing to have."

"It was good of you to come with me."

"I couldn't have stayed away."

As they left the building he said: "I liked that chap Davidson."

"Yes. He used to be Father's first assistant once—what we should call a registrar now. We saw him at home now and then. He got a job in London after a year or two."

"What did your father think of him?"

"He always used to say he was a nice chap, but without much initiative. He didn't really fancy him for the Royal."

## *Chapter Two*

THEY FOUND A TELEPHONE-BOOTH and rang Sir Arthur. Over the long-distance wire Philip heard his soft, precise, deliberate voice. It roused in him a spasm of nervousness. He still retained a certain awe in his dealings with Pamela's father.

"This is Philip Selwood, sir."

"Ah yes. Well, Philip——" Sir Arthur himself was a little forced in his use of the Christian name, "—what news?"

"I got it, sir."

"You did? I'm delighted to hear it." Sir Arthur's delight, though no doubt genuine, was controlled. Philip, who had, quite absurdly, hoped for some manifestation of an ecstasy equal to his own, was mildly deflated. Sir Arthur went on: "I always had confidence in your ability, but it's such a lottery that one doesn't dare to hope. I'm very pleased indeed."

"Thank you, sir." Philip groped around for something else to say. As on previous occasions, he found conversation with Sir Arthur difficult to maintain. He was usually left with the memory of having stood in awkward silence, punctuated by an occasional deferential word of agreement with the remarks of his superior. Fortunately Sir Arthur himself was rich in tactful and appropriate remarks.

"I imagine you'll be celebrating tonight."

"Oh, rather." Philip decided to drop the 'sir'. It was beginning to sound overdone.

"Well, try to keep moderately sober." Sir Arthur gave a

little laugh, a laugh that Philip knew well, since it was always the same. It was short, polished, controlled and intimate, yet at the same time involving no sacrifice of dignity—a living proof that its owner had a sense of humour. “And remember to bring my daughter back safely.”

“Don’t worry, sir. Would you like to speak to her?”

“If I may.”

Philip handed over the telephone to Pamela and went outside the box. When she joined him again, she said: “Father’s awfully pleased. I know he always has a tendency to say what he thinks other people want to hear, but it was different this time. I can always tell when he’s really glad about something.” She moved aside to allow him into the box. “And now—what about you? Haven’t you anyone you want to ring up?”

“Only Bella.”

“Your housekeeper?”

“Yes. She’s the only person who’ll really want to know.”

“What a pity—about your parents, I mean. It would have meant so much to them.”

Philip nodded. “It was what they always wanted.” He started looking through the small change from his pocket. He did not want to talk about his father and mother at the moment. “Come inside with me. It’s not going to be a private conversation.”

As he stood there with the receiver in his hand, listening to the operator putting through the call, Philip imagined Bella sitting in her chair by the kitchen fire, her glasses on her nose, a cup of tea at her elbow, and a pile of mending spread on her knees. She would sit like that all evening, with an occasional interval for a wireless programme she particularly liked. Her eye would be on the clock, her ear cocked for the telephone bell. Her interest in his welfare

was as deep, as genuine, and as unselfish as it was possible for anyone to feel, now that his parents were dead. She was the last remaining link with an old life that had disappeared with appalling suddenness two years ago. It was as if an explosion had occurred, destroying at a stroke everything in his world that had seemed most settled and enduring. When the smoke had cleared away, when the interminable formalities of the law, the business problems, the arguments about death duty, were all finally settled and disposed of, there was little of that life that remained to him. Money, sufficient at least to guarantee independence, the house which he had lived in since childhood—and Bella. The last two were costly luxuries. He was only intermittently at home and the maintenance of such an establishment gave a fictitious appearance of wealth. Yet he could not bring himself to dispose of them.

Bella's reception of his news was all he could have wished. For a Yorkshirewoman she was unusually emotional and demonstrative. There was a catch in her voice, and he knew that when she went back to her kitchen chair the tears would roll down her cheeks as she thought wistfully of the old times. Then she would take a grip on herself, make another pot of tea, and go to bed.

When the call was finished, he put the receiver back on the hook and turned to face Pamela.

"That's all?" she asked.

He nodded. For some reason, he suddenly found himself almost incapable of speech. They were standing cramped together in the small space of the telephone-box, their faces no more than six inches apart. He could see every detail of her skin, the few freckles below her eyes, the thin white scar where she had been cut on the forehead as a child. The booth was badly ventilated and unpleasantly hot, but

within it they were alone, separated by four glass walls from the stream of bustling London life which passed along Kingsway only a few feet away from them.

"Shall we go?" she suggested.

"Not just yet." Something was moving him, impelling him to action. This was not how he had planned it. The time and the place were quite unsuitable . . . and yet with every second he became more convinced that it must be done here, at this precise moment.

"Darling," he said, "will you marry me?"

She looked at him for a moment in astonishment and then her self-control seemed to break quite suddenly. With a burst of laughter that was half-hysterical she fell into his arms. "Of course—of course——" she said.

"You will?"

"You know I will." She whispered into his coat collar: "I was so terrified you wouldn't ask me."

For a minute or so after this nothing further was said. Such was Philip's preoccupation with his own affairs that it did not occur to him that their behaviour might be attracting attention. It was a persistent tapping sound which reminded him of the existence of the outside world.

They broke away from their embrace and looked for the origin of the noise. A middle-aged woman in a musquash coat was knocking angrily on the glass with a bunch of coppers. Next to her, forming a tiny queue, was a small unshaven man in a bowler hat reading a racing edition of the evening paper.

In some confusion, Pamela and Philip left the booth.

"I must apologise," said Philip to the woman in the musquash coat, "—keeping you so long——"

The woman glared at him before entering. "At this time of day—in a public call-box!"

The little man dropped his paper and spat disapprovingly

in the gutter. "Disgusting, I call it," he said. "Ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

A few minutes later they were standing on Waterloo Bridge. The sun was just beginning to go down after the heat of the day. London was shining and glittering on the river banks. Pamela and Philip stood there, looking over the parapet at the barges and steamers, admiring the white training-ships moored to the Embankment.

Philip said: "When I was a student at St. Thomas's I used to do this often in the evening. It gave me a feeling—I can't really describe it. . . ."

"I know what you mean," she said.

They did not speak again. There were many things they could have said. They could have declared undying love and sworn to cherish and care for each other all the days of their lives. They could have spoken of their present happiness and their faith in the future. But to both of them came the same knowledge at the same time. It was that being in love is like standing on Waterloo Bridge on a fine summer evening. The greatness, the wonder, is either there—or it is not. The tired shop-soiled words which are all we have at our disposal will never express it; they will only rob it of its magic, blur its clear-cut beauty with a film of ragged clichés. For a man who really feels this thing, it is better to be silent.

## *Chapter Three*

"IT JUST CAME OUT," explained Philip, as they travelled north in the car the next day. "I hadn't meant it to be like that at all."

"No?"



"No. My plan was to wait until after dinner. Over the coffee, you know—soft music playing—all that sort of thing. Then I'd lean across towards you a little. At first you might think I was going to ask you if you'd like another Benedictine and then you'd notice something queer about my expression. Then I'd say 'Darling' in a meaningful kind of voice, and you'd blush—and we'd be practically there. That was the original script."

"Nothing about telephone-boxes?"

"Not a thing."

"Then it was a rotten script."

"Yes, I see that now. But it just shows how little control one has over events."

"Did it ever occur to you that I might refuse?"

"Well——" he said awkwardly, "—it was always on the cards——"

"Liar," she said. "You knew I wouldn't. While I could never be absolutely certain you'd ask me. I think that's terribly unfair."

After a short interval, he said: "How do you think your father's going to take this?"

She thought for a moment. "I'm not quite sure. I should imagine that in the end he'll take it well."

"What do you mean—'in the end'?"

"After he's considered all the pros and cons. Naturally, he won't be very pleased from his own point of view. Since Mother died, I'm all he has. He's a sociable man, and he belongs to all sorts of societies and clubs and so on—but that's something quite different. When I leave, he'll miss me terribly. On the other hand, he's not the sort of person to hide his head in the sand. He must have known this was bound to come sometime."

"Does that make it any easier for him?"

"I think so. He's not just selfish. He wants me to be

happy as well as himself. He likes you. You have all the things he'd consider important in a husband for me. You're clever and well-educated and presentable. You know yourself he's something of a snob. And you're in the profession—that's very important."

"A surgeon—of twenty-four hours' seniority." He laughed. "I hope you realise that my troubles are only just beginning."

"If I don't," she said dryly, "nobody ever will. Father's been on every committee about the training of specialists since the Health Service began."

"Then you know how it is. My chances of ending up as a consultant are still pretty poor."

"According to the last survey," she informed him, "they're three to one against. Forty-eight hours ago, before you got the Fellowship, they were six to one against. So at least you're making progress."

"That's true," he said. "If I go on at this rate I shall be even money by Saturday evening."

She hesitated for a moment, as if wondering whether to speak, and then said: "You may not have to wait so long."

The car swerved a little to the left and the nearside wheels mounted a low grass bank, along which they proceeded for several yards before Philip regained control of the steering.

"Do be careful," she said.

"Sorry—you distracted me for a moment. There—we're all right now." He reduced the speed of the car. "What did you mean by that last remark?"

"I'm not sure that I really ought to tell you. It's nothing definite." She seemed to move off at a tangent. "What were you thinking of doing now—about work, I mean?"

"Try for a job as a surgical registrar somewhere. Get my foot on the bottom rung of the ladder. I'm badly in need of experience."

"In London?"

"London's hopeless. I qualified there, it's true, but I haven't any connections. And the provincial schools like to take their own graduates. So I'm neither one thing nor the other. I should have been better off if I'd stayed at home and trained at the Royal."

"You'd like to get in there?"

"Of course I would. But I haven't a chance."

"You never know."

He looked at her in mystification. "Darling, for God's sake stop being mysterious. What are you talking about?"

"All right," she said, "I'll tell you. It was Father. When I was speaking to him on the telephone last night, he said: 'That's a bright boy of yours. We must see if we can't find him a job.'"

"Was that all?" He could not hide his disappointment.

"You don't know Father like I do. He spoke as if he had something particular in mind."

"At the Royal?"

"No other hospital in his area would be of any use to you, would it?"

"Not really."

"He wouldn't offer you anything that wasn't worth taking."

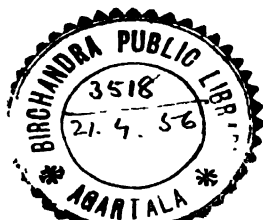
"I don't know," he said dubiously. "It all sounds very vague to me. In any case, I can't for the life of me see how he could manage it."

"He might be taking on another assistant," she suggested.

"I doubt it. There's a financial panic at the moment. The Ministry are actually cutting down staff."

"Jackson may be leaving. He's been with Father for several years now. They may have a consultant job lined up for him."

"That's a possibility, I suppose—though honestly it



seems too good to be true. I mean—just now, at the psychological moment. Life can't be like that."

"I don't see why not. It's just a question of luck. That's how Father himself got on the staff, as a matter of fact. There was a vacancy and Roderick pushed him into it."

Philip grinned. "Uncle Roddie!"

"I don't know why you think that's so funny."

"It's rather like referring to the Albert Memorial as Bertie." He shook his head sadly. "It shows how you can be taken in by these grandiose myths without being conscious of it. I'd never got around to thinking of Roderick as a real man—with friends."

"He hadn't many, if it comes to that."

"Yes, but all the same——" said Philip, anxious to pursue his own line of reasoning, "he wasn't entirely a public figure. There were times when he took his hair down. He folded up his clothes at night just like other people, and worried about his waistline, and popped his false teeth into Milton before getting into bed. Those portraits at the Royal College don't tell you a thing about that. How did he impress you?"

"He was just another grown-up to me. When you're young, you just take things for granted. It never occurred to me how important he was."

"And your father? How did he feel about him?"

She frowned. "It's not easy to say. Father's not very communicative about his own emotions. And Roderick wasn't like most people. Even when he was at home it was as if he was on a stage. He was never really informal. He could be very dictatorial and offhand if he wanted, and at one time I thought he and Father weren't getting on at all well. They seemed to get on each other's nerves." She paused for a moment, as if trying to arrange in coherent order facts which were in essence contradictory. "Then

Roderick died. It was only then that I realised how much they meant to each other. Father was miserable. In fact he got quite neurotic about it. Every little thing that happened down at the hospital worried him to death. For several months we couldn't do anything with him."

"He got over it in the end?"

"Oh yes. People always do, don't they. He had to take over the chairmanship of the staff committee and after that they made him professor of surgery. He was very busy. Then there was the knighthood. He gradually came back to normal. And so, of course, did everything else—though it was a long time before people could get used to the idea of the Royal without Roderick."

"Yes, I can imagine." Philip sighed. "I was reading a book about him. Do you know he got his Fellowship at twenty-three?"

She followed his thought without difficulty. "He didn't have to waste a couple of years in the Army as you did."

"No," agreed Philip, slightly consoled, "but here am I, getting on for thirty——"

"Poor old thing!" she said.

"You can laugh. But I haven't all that amount of time——"

She glanced at her watch. "Nor have we. You'll have to step on it if you want to put down a few drinks before meeting Father."

"What time does he get home?"

"I don't know exactly. He may be a little late, he said. He has some sort of meeting at six o'clock."

## *Chapter Four*

THE GRAFTONDALE ROYAL HOSPITAL is probably one of the dullest, ugliest, most profoundly depressing and incon-

venient buildings in the whole of the north of England. Its wards are gaunt and cheerless, its operating theatres narrow and congested, its out-patient clinics a bedlam. Its enormous corridors are like horizontal chimneys, sucking in dusty air from the street and disseminating it, in the form of icy draughts, through all the lateral wings which communicate with them.

Nor has it any external beauty to compensate for these intestinal deficiencies. It was constructed during an unfortunate period in British architecture, too late to be graceful, too early to be functional. The original building is in dark brick, of a curious porous consistency which seems not so much to be covered by the soot from the air around it as to soak it up like blotting-paper. The façade is profusely ornamented and bears a startling resemblance to St. Pancras station. Considered, at the time of its construction, to be extravagantly spacious, the hospital later proved, with advances in medical science, to be too small for the work it set out to do. The lawns which surrounded it were sacrificed, one by one, in favour of improvised out-buildings designed to house special departments, varying in size and solidity of construction according to the funds available at the time. There are two recent additions, however, which are in the most modern style and have plainly been erected regardless of cost: the private wing, donated just before the war by a local millionaire, in a praiseworthy but in the last resort hopeless attempt to put private treatment within the reach of the impecunious middle class; and the administrative block.

The administrative block is of very recent origin indeed. It juts out from the west front, a white, shining mass of reinforced concrete, like the symbol of a new order, a monument to conquest. Here the rubber floors, the cream-enamelled walls, the silent lifts and diffused lighting give an

atmosphere at once luxurious and antiseptic, which the hospital itself regrettably lacks. Here the administrators, increased twofold in salary and fourfold in number, can at last take the place which for many years a parsimonious Board of Governors denied them.

In an office labelled 'Senior Administrative Officer' sat W. J. Froy, drinking a cup of weak tea and nibbling, without any real appearance of relish, at a digestive biscuit. Mr. Froy was a gnome-like man with a pale, waxy face and an expression of preoccupation which was misleading. In fact he was quite unusually alert, and his protruding eyes, sheltering behind thick-lensed spectacles, had rarely been known to miss anything which concerned him. His air of abstraction was due simply to a painful physical dilemma. He suffered simultaneously from asthma and chronic dyspepsia. Exercise relieved his dyspepsia but intensified the asthma. When he sat down, his breathing became easier, but he was tormented by agonising cramps in his stomach. On account of this, he had formed the habit of spending large portions of his day pacing pensively to and fro across his office, like a captain on the bridge of a ship.

There was another ten minutes before the meeting. Froy wandered over to the window and gazed down into a small quadrangle, one of the few remaining areas of open space in the vicinity of the hospital. There was a piece of lawn, some flower-beds, and a fountain. The quadrangle brought back old memories. It had been laid out in the great days, directly after the inception of the Health Service. Froy remembered with nostalgia that magnificent orgy of spending. After centuries of pinching and scraping, extravagance had suddenly become a virtue, almost an obligation. First there had been the old money, money from foundations, trusts, charitable bequests, held in the name of the retiring

Board of Governors, which had to be disposed of in a hurry before the State could get hold of it. Then there had been the money from the State itself, poured out by the Minister in the flush of victory to demonstrate the benefits of the new order. There had been a new Board too, with old Brocklehurst as chairman, faithful supporters of the Minister, and determined once and for all to check the power of the medical staff. Out of this trial of strength had arisen the administrative block, the offices, the rosewood desks, the filing cabinets, the pile carpets, ever-present symbols of the new seat of authority.

Froy remembered the medical men gazing with rage and mortification at the aggrandisement of those whom they had previously regarded as little more than clerks. They had spurned the tainted money at first, refusing to demean themselves by accepting bounty from a system they hated. Yet the lure had been too strong for them. They had stood for a while like animals licking their lips wistfully in front of a carcass; then first one, then another, had come forward. They had eaten cautiously at first, and then with increasing voracity, until, in the end, dignity forgotten, they fought each other bitterly for scraps.

It was a source of pride to Froy that he had seen the end before it came. The bills came in, the deficits were published, the accountants succeeded the demagogues. The Minister retired, unlamented. The Board shook itself, as if at the conclusion of a debauch, and looked for a scapegoat. It was, Froy recollected, the fountain which had been poor old Brocklehurst's undoing. It was a small matter, comparatively speaking, a thousand pounds or so, but he had omitted to obtain official authorisation. Sooner than have the affair investigated, Brocklehurst had wisely chosen to resign. The great days were over.

There was a knock on the door.



"Come in!" shouted Froy. His chronic chest condition had robbed him of the normal variations of pitch which make the human voice attractive. He was reduced to two alternatives—a harsh, barking sound when he was anxious at all costs to make himself heard, and a soft, husky, confidential monotone for more intimate use. Occasionally, as a device to intimidate subordinates, he oscillated alarmingly and without warning from one to the other.

When the door opened, he changed rapidly to pianissimo. "Good afternoon, Sir Oswald. Come in and sit down. I hope the time didn't prove too inconvenient."

"Oh no. That was quite all right, thank you, Froy. Though I must say I didn't quite grasp why the meeting had to be postponed."

"It was Benson-Gray," explained Froy. "He was tied up with something else. And he was very keen to come. As you know, he's particularly interested in this question."

"Yes. Well, we need all the advice we can get." Sir Oswald Pettiford sat down. He was tall and stringy, with a dark, leathery skin. The lines on his face were so deep that they appeared unnatural, as if drawn by the pencil of a make-up artist.

Sir Oswald had been appointed to the chairmanship of the Board on the retirement of Mr. Brocklehurst. Though not a man of great distinction, he had had two qualifications for the job that had seemed at the time to be of paramount importance: he was careful and he was unimpeachably honest. His life had been a story of fifty years' unwavering idealism. Even in days when idealism was fashionable, it had brought him disappointing rewards. Frequently he had been within touching distance of fame, but always at the last moment it had eluded him. He was renowned, not for what he had attained, but for what he had just failed in attaining. He had almost been included in the first Labour

Cabinet. Later on, he was within an ace of being appointed Ambassador to Russia; at the last moment, the Foreign Secretary, for reasons unspecified, had changed his mind. After the war there had been some talk of giving him a peerage, but once again it had come to nothing. It was not Sir Oswald's personality alone which had been responsible for these disappointments. It was his misfortune to have spent his entire political life contesting marginal constituencies, which had led his party to think of him as a transitory figure, here today and gone tomorrow, as it were. In the country, as in Parliament itself, it had always been a very near thing with Sir Oswald. At election after election he had either almost won the seat or almost lost it.

Now, at last, at a late stage in life, he had found himself plucked out of retirement and unexpectedly honoured. It was, on the whole, a satisfactory appointment. His opponents respected his courtesy and impartiality. Those who shared his political views were less enthusiastic, but were nevertheless not disposed to complain. His demanding conscience had given him a reputation for unpredictability; if he was to be on the committee at all, they felt safer with him in the chair.

At six o'clock the chairman and secretary went into the board-room. The other members of the sub-committee had already arrived. There were three medical and three surgical representatives, together with a dermatologist, an anaesthetist, and a specialist in venereal disease. Technically, it was an advisory sub-committee to the Board of Governors. In fact, its recommendations, concerning mainly technical matters, were almost always accepted.

As if by instinct, they arranged themselves round the table in groups, the surgeons to the right, the physicians to the left, while the representatives of special departments sat

at the end of the table facing the chairman. Seniority, too, played its part. Among the surgeons, Benson-Gray, as professor, took the place of honour next to the secretary. He was a slight, dapper man, with a pale, distinguished face and thin white hair. His delicate features and slightly stooping frame gave an impression of fragility which added to, rather than detracted from, his considerable personal charm. He had, indeed, been reputed over the last twenty years to suffer from precarious health, without its ever having interfered significantly with his activities.

Froy smiled at him as they sat down. The two men were old allies. It was a sign of Benson-Gray's shrewdness that he had realised years ago where the seat of future power would lie. He was an admirable committee man; quiet, conciliatory, persuasive. In addition to this, he had one quality which in itself would have placed him in advance of the rest of his colleagues. He always knew his facts.

Below him sat John Lister Huxtable, a tall, shaggy, untidy man with cropped black hair. Though two years Benson-Gray's senior, he had been passed over in the fight for the succession after Roderick's death and had since ceased to be a person of any great importance. A bitter and unconcealed antipathy towards the National Health Service had endeared him to his colleagues, but had forced him, politically speaking, even further into obscurity.

The third of the surgeons was Isherwood. Isherwood was a comparatively young man, a mere stripling of forty-five. In a society where age was of paramount significance, his influence was necessarily limited. In due course, his time would come. Meanwhile, in deference to an unspoken convention, he confined most of his observations in committee to matters affecting his own department.

After the usual formalities the chairman introduced the real business of the meeting.

"As you will see from the agenda," he said, "the first item for discussion is the Registrar establishment at the Royal. As you all know, there is a great deal of competition for these posts, and the Ministry have made it clear to us that in their view nobody should be kept in employment unless his work is of the very highest quality. And, apart from this, they believe that, quite irrespective of the quality of the work, such posts should not be occupied for more than three years save in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of this committee. It's an unpleasant situation, as I'm sure we all agree, but there it is. Someone has to move, to make way for the young fellows coming up. Our job today is to review the various holders of these appointments in the light of reports sent in by the hospital. Does any member of the committee wish to say anything before we pass on to this?"

There was a moment's silence. Sir Oswald looked around the room. As he looked down again at the papers in front of him, a reluctant voice said:

"Just a moment. I do."

Sir Oswald raised his eyebrows.

"Yes, Mr. Huxtable?"

Huxtable scratched his head and went on awkwardly: "I'm not happy about this business—not happy at all." He looked round the table for support. A mumbled "Hear, Hear" from the representative of venereal diseases encouraged him to continue. "And I'm sure others feel the same. We're asked to send in secret reports on chaps who work with us, saying whether they ought to be chucked out of their jobs. Some of them are friends of ours. We know their families. We ask them out to dinner. Then we're supposed to go behind their backs to this committee and say they're no damn good and ought to be fired. It's an impossible state of affairs."

Huxtable stopped as suddenly as he had begun. He sat back in his chair, looking fiercely at the chairman.

"Well," said Sir Oswald slowly, "I must say I'm a little surprised—at this late stage. . . . Tell me, Mr. Huxtable, what exactly is your point? Do you contend that the committee shouldn't sit at all?"

"No." Huxtable shook his head impatiently. "That's not what I mean. It's these damned reports——"

"But surely——" Sir Oswald turned over his papers—"you've actually put in a report yourself on Mr. Crabtree."

"I know I have. I was afraid that if I didn't it might be counted against him. But," he said defiantly, "I may say that I've shown it to Crabtree before sending it in. The poor fellow's paranoid enough about the situation, without thinking people are doing him out of a job behind his back."

Sir Oswald frowned. "But, Mr. Huxtable, the whole idea of these reports was that they should be confidential."

"Then it's a bad idea. It's just a way of escaping responsibility. How do you think the man feels? He goes on for a couple of years, thinking he's doing fine. Then one morning he finds a letter from Froy sitting on his breakfast table. I know these letters—I've seen one. 'The committee regrets . . .' And ending up with a lot of humbug about thanking him for his services. That's not the way to do it. If we think a man isn't cut out for the game we ought to tell him ourselves, not hide behind a committee."

"Mr. Chairman," said the dermatologist, "is it in order to refer to the secretary's letters as humbug?"

There was a general laugh, accompanied by a relaxation in tension. Huxtable's indignation, which had worried them for a moment, began to sound a little silly.

Benson-Gray roused himself. "May I say a word, Mr. Chairman?"

"By all means, Sir Arthur."

"I think we're all perhaps a good deal in sympathy with Mr. Huxtable in this matter. We should all like to deal with these matters personally, as we did in the old days. But the old days have gone, and for better or for worse we're bound to committee procedure. Moreover, this question was fully discussed before we agreed to adopt the report system. That was about six months ago, I believe."

He turned questioningly to Froy. Froy selected a lithographed sheet from the pile which lay in front of him.

"I have the minute here," he said. The suspicion of a smile flitted across his face. "It seems that the proposal was passed unanimously. Mr. Huxtable himself presumably voted in favour."

There were other smiles. Huxtable's absent-mindedness was well known. It was only too likely that, in a fit of abstraction, he had voted in favour of a motion without knowing what it was about.

Huxtable said unhappily: "I suppose . . . if it's on the record. Though I can't say I have any recollection of it."

"Of course," said the chairman with obvious reluctance, "if you wish to reopen the question it's in your power to do so. I should have to ask you to put forward a motion. . . ."

One of the physicians looked ostentatiously at his watch. Huxtable recognised defeat.

"No," he said irritably. "I here wouldn't be much point in that. You'd better carry on."

Sir Oswald nodded, as if to commend his good sense. "Then I take it," he said, "that we can proceed to the review of the individual cases. Mr. Froy, could you give us the first one?"

The medical registrars were taken first. Froy read out the names, followed by the reports. There was little discussion. The views of the individual chiefs on their juniors were generally accepted as authoritative. The reports were

rarely openly adverse but it was easy to read between the lines. Those whose testimonials were less extravagantly eulogistic than the others, or contained qualifications of some sort, were scheduled for dismissal.

Finally came the turn of the surgeons.

"Mr. Maddox," read out Froy, "registrar to Mr. Isherwood."

Isherwood's report was good, even by the standards of the committee. It was especially impressive in that he was a man known to be exacting in his demands of his juniors, and correspondingly sparing in praise.

"I take it," said the chairman, "that you recommend his renewal."

"Yes," said Isherwood. He was a man of few words, who took his work seriously, and was rarely seen to smile. "Without hesitation." Maddox was retained.

"Mr. Wilkinson, registrar to Mr. Joyce."

Mr. Joyce, though entitled to attend, had sent his apologies for not being able to do so. His report, however, said all that was necessary. He had no complaints about Mr. Wilkinson's work, which had been satisfactory in every way. A certain lassitude and lack of drive, which was occasionally noticeable, could be put down to ill-health. The question might arise as to whether Mr. Wilkinson would be better suited to some less physically demanding branch of the profession.

By a majority vote, the committee decided to act in Mr. Wilkinson's best interests by terminating his appointment.

"Mr. Crabtree, registrar to Mr. Huxtable."

If Huxtable's earlier intervention had done nothing else, it had at least secured the position of his own man. Whatever doubts the others may have had about Crabtree's capacities, nobody felt equal to voicing them at the present time. Crabtree was retained.

"Mr. Jackson, registrar to Sir Arthur Benson-Gray."

The chairman said: "We have deliberately left Mr. Jackson to the end, since he constitutes a rather special case. He is by some distance the most senior man we have, and he has been reviewed twice already by the committee. In each case he received excellent reports and his appointment was renewed. He has held his present job for three years. I believe I'm right in saying that there's no question of his work being anything else but first class. He comes, however, into the second category mentioned in the Ministry circular—that is to say, he has held his appointment for the maximum period of time. The Ministry recommends that unless such a person has obtained a consultant post by the end of this time, he should be removed to make way for someone else. Now we all know, and so does the Ministry, that consultant posts are very difficult to get nowadays. It can't be taken as a reflection on Mr. Jackson that he has so far failed to obtain one. There are bound to be plenty of such hard cases, I'm afraid." He sighed. He felt genuinely sorry for Mr. Jackson. The frustrations of his own career had disposed him to sympathy with the disappointments of others. "If we follow the letter of the law, there is only one thing we can do. But we have certain powers of discretion. In exceptional circumstances, we are empowered to renew for another year. As I see it, the question is—are the circumstances here exceptional?"

Huxtable burst in: "Obviously they are."

The chairman looked around the table. One of the physicians said: "In what way does Mr. Huxtable consider them exceptional?"

"Mr. Huxtable?"

"Why, it's obvious. As the chairman just said—it would be a crying shame to chuck the fellow out at this stage."

"The circumstances are hard, I'll agree—but not excep-



tionally so. This sort of thing must be happening all over the country. If they make an exception of everybody, the whole training scheme will break down."

There was some desultory and inconclusive discussion. The meeting was plainly divided into three approximately equal groups—those activated by sympathy for Jackson; those who believed that the Ministry circular should be interpreted without reference to personalities; and those who believed that the meeting had gone on long enough already and were prepared to vote for anything which held out a hope of winding up the proceedings.

Benson-Gray said nothing. His position in regard to Jackson was a delicate one. Any attempt on his part to force his point of view might well arouse antagonism. It was better to wait until the others had worked themselves into a state of confusion and stalemate. Then they would be only too eager to listen to him.

As he had expected, the argument soon lost itself in irrelevance and personal animosities. Sir Oswald, searching for some means of restoring control, turned to him.

"Sir Arthur," he said, "you're perhaps the person most intimately concerned. . . ."

Benson-Gray nodded. "Yes, of course, I am. That's why I deliberately haven't said very much. A difficult question such as this ought, as far as possible, to be viewed in an unbiased fashion. I'll admit quite freely that I'm prejudiced in favour of Jackson. I've worked with him now for several years and we've got on splendidly. I couldn't have wished for anyone better. He's extremely competent, and a pleasant fellow into the bargain. It would suit me personally to keep him on for ever. But these appointments aren't arranged to suit me—I wish they were." He paused for a moment, took off his spectacles and laid them on the table. "I've been following with great interest everything that's

been said. Now it does seem to me that we haven't considered sufficiently the position of Jackson himself. Huxtable says, 'Give him another year'. That's what we'd all like to do. But would that be for the best? What can we offer him at the end of it? There are no vacancies due on the staff for several years. It might well be better for him in the end to get himself dug in at another hospital where there are early vacancies, and then step into one when the time comes. We all know how important it is to have local connections."

"Am I to take it, then," said Sir Oswald, in some perplexity, "that you are against renewal?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that. It's extremely difficult. As you can imagine, I've given the matter a great deal of thought, but I still haven't made up my mind. I should welcome any help from the rest of the committee."

But the rest of the committee had shot its bolt. The chairman said: "If there's no further discussion, I think we should take a vote. Would anyone like to frame a resolution?"

Benson-Gray leaned forward. This was the position he had played for. "Mr. Chairman, since, so far as I can see, opinion is pretty evenly divided for and against renewal, may I suggest a compromise?"

Sir Oswald looked at him gratefully.

"By all means."

"I should like to propose that while Jackson's appointment be terminated in accordance with the directions of the Ministry, yet at the same time he should be retained on a temporary footing for a reasonable period, say three months or so, thereby giving him ample opportunity to find a similar post at another hospital with better opportunities for advancement."

There was a murmur of approval from the committee. One could always trust Sir Arthur to find a way out.

"Will anyone second that?"

"Yes, I do," said the physician who had looked at his watch.

"Then we can take a vote."

The proposal was carried by a heavy majority, only Huxtable abstaining. Sir Arthur looked modestly down at his blotting-paper. It was a minor triumph, but it had required a certain finesse. From now on there was no difficulty. Froy, in his own way, was an artist at writing letters. He could be relied on to communicate the committee's decision in a fashion so offensive as to be intolerable to a man of spirit. Jackson's resignation would be automatic.

The meeting broke up. A few of the members stood chatting, in small groups, before they left. Froy said: "Are you keeping well, Sir Arthur?"

"Not too bad, thank you, Froy. Not as well as I should like to be, perhaps, but I keep going, that's the main thing." He smiled whimsically. "I'm afraid my juniors must think it very inconsiderate of me."

Froy laughed. He often wondered whether Sir Arthur himself really believed in this pose of decrepitude. "And your pretty daughter—are you still managing to keep her at home?"

"For the moment. She's just been spending a few days in London. I expect her back tonight."

Benson-Gray tried to speak of it as a matter of no great significance, but there was a warmth in his voice which betrayed him. It was as if all the emotions which he had locked out from the other sides of his life had finally concentrated themselves on this one object. He loved his daughter with a sad, hopeless, enormously vulnerable passion. As he drove home he thought of her. She should have arrived by now. With any luck she would be waiting for him, lighting up the great, luxurious, lonely old house

with her presence. She would have a fire in the drawing-room; dinner would be arranged punctually for eight o'clock and in the meantime there would be two decanters of sherry, one very dry, the other rather sweeter, for use according to his mood. She would be smiling, casually efficient, affectionate without being sentimental. She gave him the companionship which he had always longed for from his wife but never obtained, together with recurrent glimpses of his own ways of thought and speech of which she was fully conscious, but which he found inexpressibly touching. It was pleasant to think he would have good news for her.

## *Chapter Five*

"I'M AFRAID," said Sir Arthur sadly, "that there's quite a deal of unemployment in the profession—quite a deal. And it's going to get worse. Do you prefer the Tio Pepe or the Manzanilla?"

"Tio Pepe," said Philip.

"A good wine," agreed Sir Arthur, "but by no means what it was. Since the war they've produced too much of it. There's been a certain loss of distinction." He poured some of the clear golden liquid from the decanter into Philip's glass. "Now, you take Crabtree, for instance——"

Philip made a non-committal noise to hide his perplexity. He had never heard of a sherry called Crabtree. The name was rather more suggestive of a port.

"Crabtree?"

"Yes. Huxtable's registrar, you know. God knows what sort of future lies ahead for a boy like that. He's a decent fellow, no doubt, competent and conscientious. But he hasn't got a thing to make him stand out from a hundred

others." Sir Arthur poured out a glass of Manzanilla for Pamela and another for himself. "Crabtree," he went on, "isn't just an individual—he's a symptom. He didn't exist in significant numbers before the war, when there was a financial barrier to entry into the profession. Nowadays, hundreds of Crabtrees come up to the universities every year on scholarships. They work hard and behave themselves, pass their examinations, and a proportion of them get the Fellowship. They're not quite the same as the men we used to take on at the Royal in the old days, but one mustn't be snobbish. On the other hand, to get on the staff under present conditions a man requires something more than just routine competence, and he hasn't got it. It seems hardly fair to encourage him to go on. Still," he said, suddenly dismissing the problem, "that's Huxtable's worry, not mine. Tell me all about your expedition to London."

Philip gave as brief an account as he could of his experiences in the Fellowship. He was conscious of being rather dull. Two almost sleepless nights followed by a long motor journey had left him in no state for polite conversation. He was also oppressed by the necessity of picking the right moment to announce the engagement. Diplomacy would be required. He had no desire to antagonise Sir Arthur, and he was ready to be tactful and deferential if necessary. On the other hand, the marriage was a matter between himself and Pamela. He was resolved to resist to the utmost any efforts at interference.

It was in this slightly defensive mood that Philip made his announcement. Sir Arthur listened courteously, then looked at Pamela. Seeing her expression, he nodded several times. It was as if, during those few seconds, he had reviewed a series of propositions in his mind, like an experienced gambler assessing the possibilities of a hand at cards. Pamela's future, his own loneliness, the suitability of

Philip as a husband, the extent of their determination to do as they pleased, with or without his compliance—each factor was considered and its importance evaluated. And at the end was the answer, the answer he had no choice but to give.

"You're certain it's what you want? No doubts at all?"

Pamela shook her head. Philip said: "None whatever, sir."

Benson-Gray smiled. "Then I congratulate you both." He looked at his glass. "Sherry seems hardly adequate to the occasion. Pamela, do you think you could organise a bottle of champagne?"

When Pamela had left the room, Sir Arthur said: "When were you thinking of making this public?"

"I thought straight away," said Philip in a rather puzzled voice. "I was going to get in touch with the newspapers tomorrow."

"Yes. Naturally, that's what you would want." Sir Arthur went on slowly: "There is just one thing which occurs to me. . . . You may not think it of importance, but—from the point of view of an older man such as myself—I think it's worth considering."

His tone was almost diffident. Philip began to feel more at ease. The old boy was human, after all.

"You see," Sir Arthur explained, "you have to consider very carefully now what you're going to do. This is a very important time. You did well in the Fellowship, but that's only a beginning. You need a job now, the right sort of job. They're not easy to get, as you know. Now, I have an idea that in the near future something very suitable to you may be coming up at the Royal. My own registrar there is thinking of a move."

"Jackson?" asked Philip.

For a moment Sir Arthur appeared slightly disconcerted. "You know him?"

"Not personally. Pamela mentioned him to me."

"Oh, I see," replied Sir Arthur. He had regained control and his voice carried no suggestion of relief. "Jackson's a charming fellow, and wonderfully good at his job. I shall be sorry to lose him. But I've taught him all I know and it would be selfish of me to stand in his way if he wants further experience."

"Is he going to become a consultant?"

"I doubt whether he's quite ready for that yet," said Sir Arthur. "No, I gather that what he had in mind is a year at some other centre to give him a certain——" he paused, searching for the right phrase—"a certain breadth of experience before settling down in one place for life. I shan't stand in his way. I think, taking the long view, that it's a very sensible idea. Now, of course, if he does decide to do this—and as yet there's nothing definite—it will leave a vacancy. I don't know whether you'd be interested?"

"Why yes," said Philip eagerly. This was all he could have hoped for. "Naturally——"

"I should like to have you working with me, and I honestly believe you'd find it worth your while. But it will take a certain amount of arranging. There's bound to be a lot of competition. I have some influence in the choice, but the final say rests with a committee. Now if you become officially engaged to my daughter—you see how difficult my position would become?"

"Yes—I see what you mean."

"It would be bound to give rise," said Sir Arthur, without the slightest trace of irony, "to suspicions of nepotism. . . ."

"You suggest, then," said Philip, "delaying the announcement until afterwards?"

"Until several months afterwards. But then, that's up to you. You may not be prepared to agree."

"I don't know," said Philip, rather helplessly. In his

present state of fatigue the problem was too much for him. "I just don't know what to say on the spur of the moment. In any case, it concerns Pamela just as much as me. I should have to consider . . ."

At this moment, to his great relief, Pamela came back into the room. She was carrying a tray upon which there was a bottle of champagne in an ice-bucket, and three glasses. She put the tray on the sideboard, twirled the bottle two or three times in a business-like fashion and said: "It'll take a few minutes more to chill it properly." Looking at their faces, she added: "You both look very solemn."

Philip was suddenly reassured by her presence. She was so sane, so balanced, so matter-of-fact. In another girl the proposition which Sir Arthur had just made might well raise something in the nature of an emotional storm. There was no real risk of this with Pamela. She would consider the situation without passion, and make up her mind. He could safely leave the decision to her.

"Your father has just made a suggestion to me," said Philip. "Before I say anything about it, I'd like to hear what you think."

Pamela sat down. "This sounds exciting," she said. "What is it?"

Sir Arthur repeated the substance of what he had said to Philip. At the end she sat in silence for a moment.

"I can see," she said ironically, "why you wanted to get this in before I opened the bottle."

"I want to say," put in Philip hurriedly, "that I haven't agreed to anything at all. Obviously it needs thinking about, and unless you're absolutely happy about it——"

"I can't be absolutely happy," said Pamela without heat, "whichever way I decide, because there's something to be said for both points of view. I lose something either way."

"And gain something," put in Sir Arthur.



"Oh yes, I agree." She looked at her father. "May I ask one very frank question?"

"Anything you like."

"I don't want you to take offence."

"I promise not to."

"Well—this isn't just an attempt to stall me, is it? Hoping that in a few months' time I might change my mind?"

"I should be very foolish," said Sir Arthur gently, "if I thought I could change your mind in any such way."

"Yes," agreed Pamela. She suddenly smiled. "And since I think that, in spite of being my father, you're a very clever old man—I believe you."

"That my intentions are honourable?" murmured Sir Arthur. "Samuel Butler contended that all parents ought to be asked that question."

Pamela paused again. Then finally she said: "It's a disappointment, but— After all, it needn't delay the marriage, need it?"

"Of course not. In any case, Philip will have to do a year in residence, wherever he goes. You can't very well marry until he's finished that."

"Well, we might as well be sensible, then." She said rather ruefully: "I suppose this is how it will be always—putting the career first."

"I'm afraid so. It's the only way. There's one thing," Sir Arthur said to Philip: "she can never say that she didn't know what she was letting herself in for."

"It's very good of you, sir, to take all this trouble over me."

"Not at all. You're one of the family now. And incidentally, being one of the family, you might as well stay to dinner."

"Thank you very much, but I'm afraid I can't . . ."

"Oh, Philip," said Pamela, "why not?"

"It's Bella. That's my housekeeper," he explained to Sir Arthur. "She's expecting me."

"But she wouldn't mind. You could ring her up."

"No. It's not like that. She'll be waiting for me. She'll have a special meal—everything she knows I like." He laughed affectionately. "Even things I don't much like any more, but I used to when I was a boy, and I never had the heart to tell her. . . . You know how it is. I shall have to give her an account of everything that went on, and she won't understand a word of it, but she'll be as happy as a queen because everything went right. I couldn't disappoint her."

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure." He could see that Sir Arthur thought it a little odd, all this fuss about a housekeeper. But there were certain obligations, no matter how unsought or accidentally come by, which could not be ignored. To hurt Bella would be in some way like striking at his own dead parents. It never occurred to him to allow himself to be persuaded.

"At least," said Sir Arthur, unwrapping the gold foil from the champagne bottle, "you must stay for me to drink to your health and future. On that I insist."

## Chapter Six

EVENTS MOVED SMOOTHLY along the lines which Sir Arthur had predicted. There was bound, of course, to be a certain delay. "Take a holiday, my boy," he advised Philip. "Get more sunshine and fresh air. It may be your last chance for some time." Philip and Pamela spent most of the time together, playing golf and tennis and taking motor trips to the coast. Gradually, Philip found himself being accepted into the Benson-Gray *ménage*. He became on easier, more

familiar terms with the old man; the house lost its forbidding atmosphere and began to take on the character of a second home.

In due course, Jackson handed in his resignation and the job was advertised in the medical journals. Philip put in his application. Two weeks later, he was informed that his name had been placed on the short list of applicants for interview, and he was requested to present himself at the administrative block of the hospital at ten o'clock a.m. on a date in the following week.

Philip arrived ten minutes early, and was led into a small waiting-room. To his surprise, there were already six others waiting there. He had been informed in strict confidence by Sir Arthur that there were only three others on the short list, none of whom, fortunately, was outstanding. He asked: "Is everybody here for the surgical registrarship?"

"No. We three are for anæsthetics."

The voice was fairly heavily accented, suggesting an origin in Southern Europe. Philip sat down next to the one who had spoken. He was a slight, sallow man with jet-black hair and a thin hair-line moustache. He could not have been much under forty. His face was lined and there were dark shadows under his eyes. His whole attitude was one of extreme pessimism.

The others were of somewhere near his own age. Though personally unknown to him, it was as if he had met them all often before. It was like taking the Fellowship over again. The blue suits, the anxious expressions, the tremulous hands lighting repeated cigarettes. . . . When the applicants went in for interview, they would be bright, keen, enthusiastic. Until then, they could indulge in the luxury of being as despondent and cynical as they pleased.

Philip took up a tattered, year-old copy of the *New*

*Statesman and Nation* from the paper-rack, and began to read. He had no desire to enter into conversation. But the foreigner next to him did not take the hint. Plainly, he found it necessary to talk to somebody.

"You are for the surgical?"

"Yes."

"You are from this medical school?"

"Not exactly."

The man looked puzzled. "Not exactly?"

"No. I didn't train here. But I live in the district. I know the hospital fairly well."

"You know the surgeons?"

"One or two of them."

The foreigner nodded wisely. "That is an advantage. When you know nobody——" he shrugged his shoulders expressively, "——nobody knows you."

"I suppose so."

"It is so. For myself—I have applied for fifteen posts in the last six months. I have been interviewed for six. But what happens? The interviews are a farce. It is always the same. Everybody is nervous, everybody is worried—except one man. He sits in a corner by himself, reading a magazine. He gets the job."

Philip dropped his *New Statesman* unobtrusively back into the rack. "Oh, I don't know——" he said awkwardly.

"Oh yes. You will find out. After all," he said tolerantly, "it is natural. There are too many of us. They say 'Who is this man, Mola?'" He pursed his lips and gave a disapproving grunt. "They say, 'What sort of a name is that? He is not English. Where is he from? M.D. Barcelona!'" He grunted even louder. "They say, 'That means nothing to us.' One can sympathise."

Philip searched for a suitable word of encouragement. It was embarrassing to be the recipient of such confidences,

yet he could not help feeling sorry for the man. His sad, liquid eyes, the jerkiness of his movements, all seemed to indicate a state of mind perilously close to despair.

"I don't think you ought to be too defeatist," he said. "It may have been just chance. This could be your lucky day."

"It is kind of you to say so." There was no bitterness in his tone. He was not like so many of the others—failure had not made him resentful. He had reached a stage beyond that. To grumble, to protest against hardship and injustice, is in itself a sign of hope, an expression of confidence that somewhere there exists that justice which is being denied. In Mola's world there was no justice. There were only those with power, who decided, and those without, who were compelled to accept. There was no point in getting excited about it.

This he explained to Philip in his soft, confidential voice, as they waited. The other candidates for the surgical post went in, one by one. In due course, Philip's turn came.

"Good luck," said Mola. He said, with a knowing smile: "I think you will be successful."

Philip was ushered into the board-room, and given a seat at the end of the table. There were twelve members of the committee, of whom only three or four showed even the remotest indication of interest in what was going on. Sir Arthur was sitting next to the chairman. He gave no sign of recognition.

The chairman asked a series of perfunctory questions, the answer to many of which was already on his application form. Philip replied in what he hoped was a suitably brisk and enthusiastic manner. Sir Arthur also occasionally came in with a question. Though he spoke in a manner so business-like as to be almost severe, the questions he asked had always the effect of emphasising Philip's more favourable points or passing over something to his discredit. Finally,

the chairman said: "You realise this post would be resident?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see—you're not married, are you?"

"No, sir."

"I have you any intentions that way?"

Philip smiled. "Well, it happens to most of us in the end, doesn't it?"

There was a general laugh. The chairman said: "I think that's everything as far as I'm concerned. Sir Arthur?"

Sir Arthur shook his head.

The chairman looked down the table. "Do any of the other members wish to ask any questions?"

There was a short silence. Then one of the lay members leaned forward, a small fat man with rimless spectacles.

"Young man," he said, with an air of great intensity, "have you got good eyesight?"

"I think so, sir."

"But do you know? Have you had your eyes tested recently?"

"No, sir."

"Well, don't you think you ought to—eh? Very important thing in a surgeon, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, sir."

"Very well, then." The fat man nodded briskly to the chairman, with a sense of duty well done. "That's all, thank you."

Back in the waiting-room the atmosphere was overpowering. The window would not open and the air was heavy with cigarette smoke. The anæsthetists were still waiting. Philip wondered why it had been necessary to get them there at ten o'clock.

The applicants compared notes. They had all been asked similar questions, even down to the last one about having their eyes tested.

"What did you say?"

"I said I hadn't."

One of them, with obvious satisfaction at his quickness of thought, said: "I told him I had."

"And had you?"

"Of course not. But he seemed pleased."

The others looked at him enviously. In a close finish, a little thing like that could make all the difference.

After a quarter of an hour, Froy's secretary came into the room. "Mr. Selwood?" she said.

"Yes."

"Could you come along with me?"

Philip was shown back into the board-room. The chairman smiled at him. He was glad to inform Mr. Selwood that the committee had decided to appoint him to the post. He read through again the terms and conditions of the appointment. Was Mr. Selwood prepared to accept?

"Yes, sir. Thank you very much."

"When would you be prepared to start? Would next week be too early?"

"No, sir. That would be quite convenient."

"Then that's all. I hope you'll be happy here." As Philip turned to leave, the chairman said: "I think Sir Arthur would like to have a word with you in private before you go."

Benson-Gray went out with him into the corridor. As soon as the door was closed, he dropped the chilly official mask he had assumed in the board-room and shook Philip by the hand.

"Congratulations," he said. "It all went beautifully. You made an excellent impression."

"I'm very glad. I was worried for a moment. It never occurred to me to have my eyes tested."

Benson-Gray laughed. "Old Crosby always asks that—

it's an obsession of his. Between ourselves, when anyone answers 'Yes' it always puts the committee off him. They think he's a humbug."

He accompanied Philip down the stairs to the hall porter's office. "I can tell you all the details later," he said. "The thing for you to do is to have a look round the place. Atkinson, could you get Mr. Crabtree for me?"

The hall porter walked over to a bell-push. He rang four times, then paused, then rang once again. The Royal, which prided itself on being a little old-fashioned, had never looked kindly on the idea of a loud-speaker calling system. It considered the bells as in some way part of its tradition. They rang incessantly throughout the day all over the hospital, varying in length and number with the person required.

Crabtree arrived, and was introduced to Philip.

"I'll leave you to show him round, Crabtree," said Sir Arthur. "I must get back to the board-room now—these wretched anæsthetists. . . . I'll be seeing you later, Philip."

Crabtree was a man in his early thirties, with a despondent expression. His face was pallid, his collar crumpled, his fingers stained with nicotine. His ungainly walk and a habit of hunching up his shoulders within his white coat, like a vulture ruffling its neck feathers, effectively concealed the fact that he was in reality of imposing physique, and had in his university days had considerable success as an athlete as well as academic distinction. He regarded Philip with melancholy curiosity.

"You know the old boy?"

"Yes. I've been to his house a few times."

"Well, that's a good start, anyway."

"How is he to work with?"

"Not so bad. He's always pretty amiable, which is some-



thing. But he's a bit too pally with the secretary for my taste."

"Froy?"

"That's right. Do you know him?"

"No."

"You will. And if you take my advice, you won't trust him any further than you can push him. Among the boys he's known as Corkscrew Charlie." Crabtree produced a crumpled packet of Players from his coat pocket. "Have a cigarette? Oh, sorry—there's only one left."

"Have one of mine."

"Thanks very much. Well, perhaps you'd better take a look at the old mausoleum."

He took Philip on a rapid tour of the hospital. They went into wards, into operating theatres, through the casualty and out-patient departments, along twisting corridors, up and down innumerable flights of steps. The building was so large, so utterly lacking in symmetry, that it was impossible to gain any clear idea of topography. After the first five minutes, Philip was hopelessly lost. This was no new experience to him. It had been just the same at first at St. Thomas's. He estimated that it would take him at least a week to find his way round.

"I hear you're going to live in," said Crabtree.

"Yes."

"That's fine. One of us has to, and I've been doing it up to now, but I'm sick of it. I shan't be sorry to get some time off."

"You've been pretty busy?"

"You know how it is—when you live in, you're easy to get. You end up by doing everybody's work, especially at night. And then, of course, when there's nobody else here, you're in charge. You have to take the can back for everything."

The prospect was, indeed, somewhat alarming. Philip was conscious of the fact that, for a man of his qualifications, his actual operating experience was extremely thin. It was two years since he had done any surgery at all, and what he had done then had been either under supervision or on specially selected cases. From now on, he would be completely on his own. During the day, it would not be so bad; Sir Arthur, he was sure, would help him, especially at the beginning. But in the night-time . . . The Royal was a busy hospital. The emergencies would come in, and when they came, they were his. Mere operating technique was not enough. There was the question of judgment and coolness of head. He would be confronted with the unexpected, the unfamiliar, the alarming. If he called for help, help would be forthcoming; in the last instance nobody could refuse. But if he called too often it would be the worse for him.

He tried to sound as confident as possible.

"I shan't mind if there's plenty to do," he said. "I'm a little rusty on emergency work."

"Well, you can do as much of mine as you like," said Crabtree. "I'm sick of the bloody sight of it."

They were back at the porter's office now. Crabtree said: "I think that's the lot. Do you mind if I push off now?"

"Not a bit. Thank you very much."

"That's all right." A look of intense concentration came on to Crabtree's face as he ran his hands through his pockets.

"Now where the hell . . ."

"Cigarette?" suggested Philip.

"Oh—thanks awfully. I say—you couldn't lend me a few, could you? I seem to be right out of them."

"By all means."

"That's awfully good of you." He put one cigarette into his mouth and the others into his breast pocket.

"I'll pay you back when I see you. Good-bye for now."

As Philip prepared to leave, he heard a shout behind him. Looking back, he saw Mola, racing down the stairs two at a time. When he reached the bottom of the steps, the little Spaniard rushed up to Philip and slapped him on the back.

"I thought I should miss you," he said. He was in a state of high excitement. "But I have just got to you in time. I have not been able to tell you how happy I am at your success!"

"How did you get on?" There was really no need to ask. Mola's jubilation was quite touching.

"I am appointed!" He spoke as if springing a great surprise. "I have no hope—no expectation. I think it is, as usual, a wash-out. I console myself by thinking that, as always, I make a little on my expenses. The interviews are over and we wait. We wait for half an hour, three-quarters. I wonder what they can possibly find to talk about. Then, suddenly——" he paused, anxious to extract the full dramatic value from the moment—"the door opens and in comes the young lady. 'Mr. Mola?' she says. And there it is—I am appointed."

"I'm delighted," said Philip, with complete sincerity. It was wonderful to see the change in the little man. "So you see," he pointed out, "you were wrong. There is such a thing as justice, after all."

"Yes, it is true—you are quite right." Mola laughed delightedly. "You have proved me a complete fool, isn't that so? Well, I don't mind. I am glad. We shall be working together, it seems. You will not find me such a bad anaesthetist."

"I'm sure I shan't." Philip was beginning to find Mola's high spirits infectious, particularly by contrast to the lugubrious Crabtree. "What about having a drink on it?"

"Oh, I am so sorry." Mola was suddenly cast down. "I

would like to so much, but I have to hurry. I must catch a train. Will you be offended if I refuse?"

"Not in the least."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye. See you soon."

Mola ran down the drive towards the bus-stop, his unsuitable black coat flying in the wind. One hand clutched an attaché case, the other held his Homburg hat firmly on to his head. Philip watched him with affection. There was something very attractive about the man. He was so very defenceless, so anxious to please. During the trials which lay before him in the next few months, Philip was consoled to feel that he would have at least one friend.

## *Chapter Seven*

FROM THE FIRST MOMENT of taking up his duties at the Royal, it was borne in upon Philip that his was not a job in the ordinary sense of the word—the performance of a certain amount of work for an agreed monetary reward. His salary had, indeed, never been mentioned at the interview. The Royal did not really approve of the principle of paying house officers, and, though now compelled to adhere to the National Health Service rates, it looked back wistfully to the days when its medical staff received either no reward at all or some small token payment known delicately as an honorarium.

Philip had the sense of taking part in some sort of ordeal, a prolonged ceremony of initiation into certain mysteries. It was assumed that he regarded it as a great privilege to be chosen, and his personal comfort and convenience were considered to be of no importance. The right was reserved to reject him at any stage of the proceedings.

This was made clear to him by Sir Arthur himself on the evening before he started.

"I may as well warn you, Philip," he said, with a certain relish, "that you're in for the toughest few months that you're ever likely to experience. I don't say this to frighten you, but you may as well be prepared. I'll do everything I can to help you, but, frankly, there's nothing much anybody can do. You can train a man so far, then you've got to leave him on his own. You've got to trust him. It's a great responsibility for us as well as you. I'm not worried—I think you'll be all right. But one can never be sure. It's possible to tell in a very short time how things will turn out, and everyone will be watching you. Don't let that put you off. Remember, we've all been through it. You'll make mistakes, of course—that's inevitable. Try not to make them too many or too serious. And, above all, never try to conceal them. That's the quickest possible way of finishing yourself for good."

What Sir Arthur did not say was that only a proportion of Philip's difficulties were directly connected with surgery. The post of resident surgical registrar had accumulated over the years a good deal of administrative work of a vague and anomalous kind. As senior resident officer he was expected to supervise the work and to some extent the behaviour of the other residents; he was also by convention their representative in any negotiations with the consultants, the nursing staff, or the administration. He was in charge of the bed state, in an overcrowded hospital where each consultant believed firmly and passionately that he was allocated far too few beds and had consequently a moral right to steal those of his colleagues whenever the opportunity presented itself. He was responsible for emergency admissions, which he must accept or reject as he saw fit. This last was a task calling for considerable tact and resource. If, on the one

hand, he was over-cautious, and admitted everything which the general practitioners suggested to him, he was liable to fill the beds with cases which were not emergencies at all, completely blocking admissions from the waiting-lists. If he refused too often, at the least he would anger the practitioners, many of whom were friendly with the consultants. At the worst, he might be responsible for a death.

He was incessantly reminded of the most delicate aspect of his own position. If power without responsibility is a grave social evil, responsibility without power is an equally grave personal disablement. Philip soon found that he was held accountable for matters over which he had, in reality, no control. Real power rested elsewhere, not only with the consultants and the administrators, but with various other individuals, such as the more elderly ward sisters, who had, by reason of efficiency, length of service, or social contacts, arrogated to themselves authority far in excess of that which they nominally held. Such people were dangerous to attack. Determined, revengeful, and with an incurable addiction to gossip, they demanded a constant recognition of their importance.

It was soon apparent to Philip that he had little chance of pleasing everybody. He was led by necessity into certain delicate and ignoble calculations concerning whom, in a particular dispute, it was less damaging to offend. It was necessary to make an accurate assessment of the balance of power within the hospital.

Benson-Gray was by far the most influential among the surgeons. His position, however, was by no means unassailable. He was getting on in years; within a relatively short time he would be compelled to retire, and the professorship would pass to somebody else. There was a good deal of interest in the succession. Huxtable was out of the question, since he too was near the age of retirement. Joyce was still

young. Unless the Board appointed an outsider, Isherwood was practically a certainty for the chair.

There was little reason why the Board should search further afield. Isherwood was competent, strong-willed, and enormously industrious. He was already in his forties, in the process of building himself an international reputation in his own specialty. If he was a little chilly in his personal relations, a little lacking in charm and a wider general culture, that was only in keeping with modern trends. What might be termed the Romantic Movement in surgery was over. Flamboyance had gone out with the wing collar, the carnation in the buttonhole, the good cigar. Philip found that Roderick's hypnotic personality, his pretensions of infallibility, were now something of a joke among the younger men. Even his marble bust, prominently displayed at the head of the main staircase, had recently been protected by a pane of glass, as a consequence of an act of desecration by intoxicated students.

The keynote nowadays was science. The units grew larger, embellished with research assistants, physicists, biochemists. The operation itself was considered to be a minor incident in the course of a complex physiological experiment. The surgeon looked upon himself, not as a unique individual, gifted with unusual powers, but as the director of a team.

The registrars were particularly sensitive to this change of emphasis. There was a tendency to judge a consultant by the amount of space and number of staff he had managed to acquire. Huxtable was a back number; Benson-Gray, though still supreme, was a symbol of the past. Isherwood was the man of the moment.

Indeed, within his own unit he was regarded with a degree of respect bordering on hero-worship. Those who worked for Isherwood looked with lofty contempt upon

their less fortunate colleagues. Maddox, in his two years as registrar to the unit, had acquired almost a new personality. Previously a very ordinary, lumpish young man, distinguished for nothing but industry and persistence, he had managed to develop a smug condescension of manner, an air of being implicated in mysteries only comprehensible to the elect, which might have been deliberately designed to arouse the fury of his contemporaries.

"You'll find," he said to Philip, "that all the really worthwhile work in this place is done by Neil."

"Neil?"

"Isherwood. Everybody calls him Neil. You'd be well-advised to come along and watch him if you have any time to spare."

"Thanks," said Philip. "I hope the others aren't completely valueless."

Irony was lost on Maddox. "Well, Joyce isn't too bad," he said judicially. "Of course, he's only just starting, really, but he's got the right idea. It'll take him five or six years to find his feet. As far as the old boys are concerned—well, you'll see for yourself. You've met Huxtable?"

"No."

"A nice fellow. Very pleasant socially. But he oughtn't to be allowed within ten feet of an operating table."

"Is he dangerous?"

"My dear boy, Sweeny Todd isn't in it."

"And Benson-Gray?"

Maddox looked at him warily. "I believe he's some sort of a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"You can speak freely. I shan't take offence."

"He's all right, really. But he's getting on. He hasn't had a new idea for the last twenty years. And he was never a natural surgeon. Too imaginative—frightens himself to death. Of course," Maddox went on, "he doesn't do as



much as he used to. Jackson was doing an awful lot of his work before he left. You should get plenty of experience."

"Why is he doing so little?"

"He's tied up with committees most of the time. That's where he really shines. He's pretty well run this place for the last fifteen years, since Roderick died. Mind you, he's no Roderick. He does his best, but, according to Neil, there's no comparison between them. Roderick was an old humbug, but he had a tremendous lot of force. Nobody ever thought of contradicting him. B.G. doesn't always get his own way. Look at your predecessor, for instance."

"Jackson?"

"Yes. Now it was common knowledge that B.G. and Jackson were as thick as thieves. He wanted Jackson to stay on until he retired. But the Board said no, and no it was. Jackson told me—the old man was very shaken about it."

"I see." Philip frowned. There was something wrong somewhere. What Maddox had just said did not fit in with Sir Arthur's own remarks about Jackson. How had the old man put it? Something about Jackson wanting to widen his experience and not wishing to stand in his way. Somebody was lying. Perhaps Sir Arthur's vanity would not allow him to admit that he had fought to retain Jackson and failed. Alternatively (and this seemed to be quite the most likely explanation) perhaps Maddox had heard a completely distorted account of the situation.

By the time he had decided this, Maddox had moved on to another subject.

"Have you heard from our new resident anaesthetist?"

"Froy tells me he'll be here in a fortnight."

"What does he call himself?"

"Mola. He's a Spaniard. Qualified in Barcelona, I believe."

"Sounds dreadful."

"He's quite a nice little man. I met him at my interview."

"Neil," said Maddox, as if settling the matter, "says he thinks he'll be no use at all."

"Then why did they appoint him?"

Maddox became confidential. "Well—keep this under your hat; Neil told me in confidence—it seems they got themselves into a mess at the interview. Half of them wanted one man, and half the other. McBain, the senior anæsthetist, was trying to push a friend of his. When the committee wouldn't have him, he turned obstinate and wouldn't agree to the other. B.G. supported McBain, then Neil got mad and pitched in at the pair of them. It went on for about an hour. In the end, they decided that the only thing to do was to wash out both the two candidates and give the job to the third fellow, who happened to be this Spaniard character. Can you beat it?"

Philip remembered Mola's face after the interview. It was one of the scenes that stayed in the memory. He felt slightly nauseated.

"It seems hardly fair," he said.

"That's what McBain's fellow said. He'd been given to understand it was an open and shut job."

"I meant for Mola."

Maddox was puzzled. "I don't see why. It was a bit of luck for him. If it hadn't been for this trouble, he would never have had a smell at it. Of course, it's true that they'll probably ease him out in a few months, once they've patched things up between them. . . ."

"That's what I meant. They've decided he's no good, before he's even started."

"That's the way it is," said Maddox indifferently. "I've got plenty of troubles of my own, without breaking my heart over these blasted D.P.s. The profession's overcrowded enough as it is."

## *Chapter Eight*

ALTHOUGH THEY HAD BEEN INTERVIEWED on the same day, Mola was not due to take up his duties until two weeks later than Philip. In accordance with custom, Philip, as senior resident, was notified of the expected arrival of the new anaesthetist and asked to receive him and make him comfortable.

A date was given, but no time. In fact, Mola turned up so late that Philip was beginning to suspect that some mistake might have occurred. It was almost midnight before the hall porter rang up to notify him that the new doctor had at last arrived.

Philip went down to the main hall, to find Mola, surrounded by a pile of assorted luggage, carrying on an acrimonious dispute with a taxi-driver.

"It is quite illegal!" he was saying heatedly, his dark little eyes glittering with excitement. "It is against all regulations to charge double fares after dark. I have had this argument many times before. I warn you, my friend, you have picked the wrong man. Furthermore you are a taxi, are you not?"

The driver made a non-committal, growling sound.

"You must be, of course, since you were plying for hire on the station. And if you are a taxi, why is your meter not working? That is in itself an offence."

"I've told you how much it is," said the driver doggedly. "Come on now, pay up."

"I will pay you the correct fare, which is half what you ask," said Mola. "And if you make trouble I will report you to the police." He dropped some coins in the man's hand, then turned round and saw Philip. "Ah, my good friend!" He picked up Philip's hand and shook it effusively. "How kind of you to welcome me!"

"I'm glad to see you," said Philip. "I thought for a moment you weren't coming." He gave instructions to the porter about the luggage and together they went up to Mola's room. The taxi-driver, after meditating the possibility of further action, decided against it and went out, slamming the hall door behind him.

Philip felt a little bewildered. This was not at all the Mola he had remembered from the interview. There was a self-confidence, a sort of febrile aggressiveness, which he had never suspected at their first meeting.

Mola talked rapidly all the time as they went upstairs and as they waited for the luggage to be brought up. He became so engrossed in his conversation that he inadvertently burned a hole in his coat with a lighted cigarette. It was somehow all rather strange and out of character, almost as if he might be drunk—but he showed none of the other signs of drunkenness. The Spaniards, Philip reminded himself, were a proverbially volatile race.

"I must apologise to be so late," said Mola. "It was unfortunately not possible to be otherwise. I have been travelling since early this morning."

"Where did you come from?"

"London."

"But surely," said Philip, in some perplexity, "that would only take you about six hours?"

Mola lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "It is not always possible," he said cryptically, "to take the most direct route from place to place."

"Oh, I see. You had somebody to visit?"

"No." He smiled, a curious, inward smile, as if delighted with his own cleverness. "Someone to avoid." He added slyly: "A woman."

Philip smiled back in what he hoped was an understanding fashion. He appeared to have trespassed inadvertently

on certain private affairs. Fortunately, Mola did not seem to mind—in fact, quite the reverse. Perhaps he liked to see himself as a Casanova. Looking at the slight, rather dilapidated figure, Philip was amused at his vanity.

Some cold food had been left in the dining-room. Philip sat with Mola as he ate sparingly of the cold ham and salad, in between puffs at a cigarette. He talked to Philip in a confidential, uninhibited way, as if they were friends of many months' standing.

From what he said, Philip gained a sketchy general picture of the story of his career. It was the sort of story which would have been considered violently dramatic and hardly believable twenty years ago, but in the nineteen-forties and 'fifties was nothing out of the way.

He had qualified in Barcelona during the Civil War and, like most of the Catalans, had fought on the Republican side. When the war was obviously lost, he had escaped to France and managed, after some initial trouble with the French authorities about papers, to settle down for a while. He had some ill-paid post writing propaganda for the so-called Spanish Government in Exile.

Peace had not lasted for long. When the European War began, he had joined the French Army (as an ordinary soldier—they would not accept his medical degree) and had been captured, without firing a shot, at the time of the capitulation. Foolishly, he had retained letters and documents in Spanish, and in due course the Gestapo contrived to extract from him the rest of his political history. He was immediately transferred to a concentration camp.

The camp was no better than others of its kind. Mola was beginning to think he could not survive much longer when he had an accident in the forest. One day when out working the branch of a tree fell across his back, pinning him to the ground. It took some time to release him, and afterwards

the pain in his back was excruciating. There were no X-rays in the camp and the doctor simply gave him some liniment to rub on it. He was told to continue work but, despite all the threats and beatings of the guards, he found it impossible to do any form of manual labour. In the end, the doctor relented and recommended him for light duty as a hospital orderly. It was some months before the pain subsided and he was well again. By this time he was doing most of the medical work in the camp, and was allowed to stay on in his new job.

Some time after this he had managed to escape. He had lived for a while with the partisans in Yugoslavia, and then later joined the British forces in Italy. But once again his career as a soldier was short. Less than a year after his escape from the camp he was brought to England and discharged as medically unfit.

At this point in his story, Mola halted abruptly. His previous animation seemed to ebb away from him.

"And after that?" asked Philip. He felt somehow that, having listened to the harrowing part, he had a right to the happy ending.

"After that——" from being almost unnecessarily forthcoming, he became suddenly vague "—my troubles were by no means over, that I can say."

Philip did not pursue the matter. He did not wish to hear any more than Mola wanted to tell. Indeed, he was not very sure that he had wished to hear as much as he had. There were so many of these pathetic and agonising stories nowadays, each making a claim on sympathy, creating an obscure sense of obligation. It was much simpler if one could keep clear of them.

Mola pushed away his plate, as if pushing something else away with it. "But I have hope now," he said. "Perhaps this will be a start of better things. I hope to have got away

from some of my troubles today. And this job is a great opportunity for me—you agree?"

Philip nodded unhappily. He was overcome with a sense of shame. It was as if, by having heard of the disreputable negotiations which resulted in Mola's appointment, he had in some way acquired responsibility for them. Perhaps, he thought to himself, if I were entirely honest, I should tell him. But the thought of the pain he would cause deterred him. Nor was he quite justified in doing so. What Maddox had told him was little more than hearsay.

"Yes," said Mola. "I think so too. I shall like this hospital—I know it. I shall do anything——" he banged his fist on the table with embarrassing emphasis "—to make a success of it."

On the following morning, when Philip met him at breakfast, it was the old Mola again, the Mola of the interview. He looked a smaller, seedier, more diffident man than on the previous night and it was no longer easy to visualise him fighting victorious battles with taxi-drivers. He was like a hedgehog who had taken fright and rolled up into a ball. And thus, for some time to come, he remained.

To Philip's relief, he turned out to be a practised and competent anaesthetist. They would not be able to find very much wrong with his work as an excuse for removing him.

After a while he even began to wonder whether Maddox's information had been incorrect. There was no obvious attempt to make things difficult for Mola. The surgeons were polite to him, the anaesthetists, even McBain himself, went out of their way to give him encouragement. Mola visibly expanded under this treatment. His expression became less melancholy, more trusting. He occasionally made laborious jokes in broken English.

Philip found himself drawn by circumstances more and

more into Mola's company. Most of the other residents were young men newly qualified at the Royal who had passed through their training together and formed a social group of their own. During the evenings when nothing much was happening, or in the intervals between operations when they would sit waiting in the surgeons' room, there was a good deal of time for talk. Occasionally they would play a desultory game of billiards together. Mola was amiable, occasionally interesting, and always anxious to please. He aroused in Philip an emotion partly compounded of amusement, partly protective in nature. After that first evening he showed no further desire to talk of his earlier life.

During this time Philip was becoming insensibly absorbed into the routine of the hospital. He learnt quickly. The circumstances were such as to favour this, since, apart from one evening during the week and an occasional week-end, he was for all practical purposes a prisoner in the building. His duties kept him busy throughout the day, and often through part of the night also. The confused blur of early impressions gradually resolved itself into a pattern. Each day, things were just a little easier than the last. The house surgeons were good, particularly his own, a quiet, conscientious boy named Greenwood, who simultaneously flattered and embarrassed Philip by calling him 'sir'.

Benson-Gray was kindly, helpful, understanding—and inquisitive. It was his custom to spend at least half an hour each morning talking over cups of coffee. In between snatches of gossip and reminiscence, he would question Philip about the happenings of the previous day. He was a man of catchwords. Always these interrogations began in the same way.

"Well, Philip," he would ask benignly, "what's the bad news?"

There was a significance in this way of phrasing. It was



an attempt to ward off disaster by anticipating it. Maddox had been right about Sir Arthur's attitude towards his work. In thirty years he had experienced almost every conceivable surgical catastrophe. He remembered them all vividly, like a series of nightmares, and lived in constant fear of their recurrence.

After Philip had discussed with him the condition of the patients, Sir Arthur would move on to other matters. He was interested in whatever happened in the hospital, however trivial. Often Philip found it difficult to decide how much to tell him. By an unspoken tradition, whatever was said and done between the residents in their own quarters was confidential, and should not be repeated to the consultants. Sometimes Sir Arthur's inquiries moved perilously close to the borderline of discretion and had to be evaded as politely as possible. Though anxious to please his superior, Philip had no intention of acquiring the reputation of a spy.

On one occasion Mola's name came up in the course of the conversation.

"How are you managing with him?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Oh, very well. He gives pretty good anæsthetics."

"Indeed?" Sir Arthur polished his glasses thoughtfully. "Of course, the surgeon only sees one end. McBain was talking about him the other day. It seems he's a little slapdash in his use of these new intravenous drugs."

Philip said nothing. He was in no position to contradict. He knew now that Mola's position was a great deal more precarious than it appeared on the surface.

"McBain," went on Sir Arthur, "is a very cautious man. He believes, I think rightly, that anæsthetics is no sort of a field for taking chances. He never wanted to take this fellow on at all."

"Really?" said Philip, simulating surprise. Interested to

know how Sir Arthur would reply, he asked: "Then how was he appointed?"

"Isherwood." Sir Arthur's lips tightened. "He's begun to show his teeth lately. He's been trying to assert himself by going against the senior members of the staff whenever he thinks he can get any support. It's ever since the Board let him start that vascular unit." He gave a short, bitter laugh. "And I was the one who pushed it through for him. He played a very different tune in those days."

## Chapter Nine

ONE EVENING, about a month after Mola's arrival, Philip was in his sitting-room going through back numbers of the *British Journal of Surgery*, when there was a knock on the door. He put down his journal with a sigh of exasperation. It was almost certainly the night sister, bearing news of trouble. He was relieved to find that it was only Mola.

"Come in," he said genially. "Make yourself at home."

"Do you mind?" asked Mola, closing the door and edging diffidently towards a chair. Philip looked at him with some interest. This was neither the quiet, melancholy Mola of his usual experience nor the excitable, aggressive individual who had arrived on that first evening in the hospital. It was a third person, even more pallid than usual, and with a hunted, apprehensive expression. He looked like a man who had received a piece of catastrophic news which was not, at the same time, entirely a surprise. "Perhaps," he suggested timidly, "I am disturbing you?"

"Not at all. So long as you don't want me to do any work. . . ."

"No, no!" With a ghastly smile, Mola disclaimed any such

intention. As he took a chair, he moved it automatically a little further towards the wall, as if to increase the distance between the two of them. "No, I simply wished to have a talk with you."

"Delighted," said Philip. He found himself falling into an exaggerated bonhomie, in an attempt to allay Mola's awkwardness. "A cigarette? A drink?"

"Thank you, no. Nothing at all. Though it is very kind of you," he added carefully. He pressed his upper lip against his teeth and nibbled a piece of loose skin. Philip waited expectantly. From Mola's introduction he presumed there was some specific matter to discuss—probably something to do with his job. Had he, perhaps, run into trouble with one of the consultants?

"Always," said Mola eventually, "you have been a very good friend to me. I wish you to know that I appreciate this." As Philip was about to speak, he held up his hand. "Yes, I know you do not wish to speak of such things, because you are English and it embarrasses you. Nevertheless, it is so."

"It's very kind of you . . ." said Philip perfunctorily. Though no doubt flattering, he could not help regarding Mola's last speech as so much beating round the bush. He waited impatiently for him to get to the point.

"It is because of this," went on Mola, choosing his words carefully, as if according to a prearranged plan, "that I come to you. You will understand—it is not easy for me—I have no family, no intimate friends. Otherwise I would not bother you with such matters. . . ."

"What sort of matters?"

Mola breathed deeply and began to gnaw his lip again. "I wish to ask you a favour."

"Well, carry on."

"Yes, but—I have wondered whether I should ask you.

You see," he said earnestly, "you do not understand. In a foreign country, one can live a long time—one can learn the language—but there are some things it is difficult to be sure of. The relations between men and women—they are much the same anywhere. There is little difficulty. But between one man and another . . . that is a very different matter."

"I think you probably exaggerate the difficulty of our customs," said Philip flippantly. "I'll try not to be too conventional. If I feel a tendency to be shocked, I'll just remind myself that you're a foreigner and don't know any better. I promise you not to take offence. And if I don't want to do whatever it is, I can always refuse."

"Very well. Then I will ask you. I wish to borrow some money."

Philip felt a sense of anticlimax. After such a build-up. . . . It was quite usual for the residents to come to him for small loans. He was the treasurer of the Mess Fund, a sum of money obtained by pooling statutory fees from such activities as attending inquests and signing cremation forms. After various collective expenses had been met, the Mess Fund paid out a dividend of two or three pounds per member each month. By common agreement money could be advanced by the treasurer, based on the security of later dividends. Most of the residents made use of this facility at one time or another. They were wretchedly paid and frequently ran out of money towards the end of the month. There was no need for Mola to make such an issue of it.

"I think it could probably be arranged," said Philip. He opened the drawer in which the cash-box was kept. "How much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds?" Philip looked up in astonishment. "But

that's impossible. There's only about twenty in the pool. And apart from that . . ."

Mola shook his head. "You misunderstand me. I did not imagine that it was possible to take it out of the pool. I was hoping to borrow from you personally."

"Oh—I see." The reason for the preamble was now apparent. Philip realised that he, not Mola, had misjudged the seriousness of the situation. He was a little confused. Nobody had ever tried to borrow from him on this scale before. At one time there would have been no problem, since he would not have had the money. Nowadays he had. On the other hand, he found himself extremely disinclined to lend it. "I'm afraid——" he said slowly "—that's a great deal of money. Much as I'd like to help you . . ."

Mola leaned forward. Now that the subject had been broached, a good deal of his nervousness seemed to drop from him. Nor did he appear cast down by Philip's unpromising response; it was almost as if it had been better than he had expected.

"Before you say anything," he said, "you will naturally wish to know the purpose for which I need the money. It is for nothing frivolous, I can assure you." He clasped his hands earnestly before him. "I do not exaggerate when I say that my whole career, my whole life, is at stake."

He paused effectively. Despite the melodramatic phrasing, it was obvious he meant every word he said. If nothing else, he had at least aroused Philip's curiosity.

"I need the money to pay a debt," he said, "a debt which is of long standing. If I do not pay this sum within a few weeks, I shall be ruined. No——" he put up a hand. "Please do not say anything until you know the facts. Then you will see that it is literally true. Of course, you are no doubt thinking: 'Even if it is true, why does he get himself into such a position? It must be his own fault.' It is easy to

think in such a way. But let me tell you what happened. Then perhaps you will think how you would have acted in my position. . . .”

It all began (said Mola) soon after he was invalided out of the Army. This was, of course, his great day, the moment he had looked forward to for years. For the first time since September 1939, he was a free man in a free country.

The sensation turned out to be much less exhilarating than he had imagined. England at that time was a sombre, unfriendly place, very much preoccupied with its own problems. It had little interest in impecunious foreigners who were not even able-bodied enough to fight. Concentration camps were old news, refugees ten a penny. A Spanish medical degree was not recognised for practice in England, except under special dispensation. If Mola could get his name on the British Medical Register he could make a good living, otherwise he was destitute.

He was given to understand that, having served in the Army, his chances of being accepted on to the register were good. He made application through the authorities, but ran into a series of inexplicable and exasperating delays. He waited for several months without getting a satisfactory reply. Meanwhile his small stock of money was running out.

He was beginning to give way to despair. It was useless to tell himself that he had been worse off in the past; it was mainly the sufferings of the past which had robbed him of the vitality necessary to cope with his present disappointments. It was particularly demoralising to be denied the security he had yearned for, when it was so nearly within his grasp.

He was living at the time in a bed-sitting-room in Holland Park. The house was owned by a genteel, avaricious widow

who had converted it as an investment and was sternly opposed to the granting of credit. The occupants took their meals in a small dining-room in the basement, heavy with the odour of cooking vegetables. It was here that Mola took one of the most unfortunate decisions of his life.

In the dining-room each resident had a small table to himself. Directly opposite to Mola, at another single table, sat a woman of approximately his own age. She was dark and of somewhat heavy build. Though no beauty, she was not bad-looking in a ponderous way. She dressed drably, in woollen jumpers and thick tweed skirts. Her features were good, but often spoilt by an expression of pouting dissatisfaction which they tended to adopt in repose. Sometimes Mola would look up from his plate and see her eyes gazing at him with a purpose difficult to evaluate.

At the table on his left was a New Zealander with whom he occasionally exchanged a few words. One evening after dinner, when the woman had just left the room, the New Zealander said:

"Have you met our Elizabeth yet?"

"No."

"Well, watch out for yourself when you do. She's got her eye on you. She was practically eating you up all through dinner."

Mola raised his eyebrows. "She is—like that, eh?"

"You bet your life. No woman ever licked her lips like that over finnan haddock."

"She is not unattractive," said Mola thoughtfully, "though, of course, no longer young."

"Well, you can't have everything. They say she's got plenty of money."

This last statement made a profound impression on Mola. He was nearing the end of his resources and had nobody to

whom he could turn for help. A rich woman, infatuated with him. . . . The idea of making love on such a basis was not congenial. At one time he would have rejected the suggestion with contempt. But the last few years had taught him that it was not always possible to be fastidious. In the extremity, sense of honour fought a losing battle with the instinct of self-preservation.

The next time he caught her watching him in the dining-room, he smiled at her. She replied with a grimace that was nothing more than a sign of recognition, but when he lingered over his coffee, she also stayed. He offered her the paper and engaged her in conversation. She responded, but in an awkward, self-conscious manner. Her voice was rather harsh, and she replied to his questions in brief, staccato sentences as if anxious to close the conversation.

Afterwards he mentioned that he was in the habit of going for a walk around the park in the evening. Would she care to accompany him? After a show of hesitation, she assented.

"After all," she said gracelessly, "I suppose there's nothing else to do."

She was not easy to talk to, but Mola worked hard. By the end of the walk they were on easier terms, and once or twice he had even made her smile. Before they parted, she had agreed to go to the cinema with him.

They went out several times together during the next few weeks. With all the diplomacy he could muster, Mola tried to find out if the rumour he had heard about her wealth was correct. From various hints which she dropped he concluded that she must have private means of some sort, though it was impossible to guess how much. She had also a tendency to talk mysteriously of aristocratic connections, but to these Mola attached little importance.

His main preoccupation was with the delicate question of



timing. He was not in a position to wait too long. On the other hand, precipitate action might arouse her suspicions and ruin everything. He left as long as he dared for their intimacy to mature, and waited for a suitable opportunity.

One evening, instead of saying good-night as usual on the stairs, she asked him into her room for a cup of tea. The room was similar to his own, with a divan-bed in one corner, a wash-basin hidden by a screen, and two threadbare arm-chairs in front of the gas-fire. She had attempted to create a more feminine atmosphere by putting up a pair of flowered rayon curtains with a bedspread to match, but without any noticeable success.

She boiled a kettle on the gas-ring. As they sipped their tea, she said:

"I suppose a lot of people wouldn't consider it very proper for me to have you in my room like this. My family would be horrified. Of course, they live in the provinces. In London, it's different."

"Yes—of course."

"But people are very narrow-minded. Especially about foreigners. They have a very bad reputation as far as sex is concerned."

"So I believe."

"If some of these old women who live here knew that you'd been here, they'd take it for granted that I'd been to bed with you."

"Oh, surely not."

"Yes, they would," she said earnestly. "They have the filthiest minds."

She told him of some of the previous scandals that had enlivened the conversation of the house. As she did so, her expression and mode of speech became increasingly animated, almost lascivious. It seemed to Mola that she was deliberately inducing in herself a state of excitement. He

was convinced that she had invited him in the hope that he would make love to her.

Now was the time for him to act. Though he had little enthusiasm for the project, it was necessary to carry it through. He was prepared to do what was expected of him. It would, at least, he thought, be a relatively swift and easy seduction.

To his surprise, he found himself firmly repulsed. While she responded to his kisses with appreciation and energy, any further advances called forth immediate resistance. She grasped his hand and pulled it away from her breast. For a woman, she had an unusually strong grip.

"Men are all alike," she said indignantly. "They think of nothing but sex."

"No!" cried Mola, stung by the injustice of the accusation. "I assure you that is not so."

"It's true. You pretend to enjoy my company, but really you only want me to sleep with you."

"It is natural," protested Mola, "for a man and woman to make love. I cannot compel you to do anything you do not wish to do."

She looked at him intently. "You think I want you, don't you? You think you can work me up so that I don't know what I'm doing—that's what you're after. Don't think you can fool me. I've had plenty of experience with men."

She went on to talk of her previous conquests. Mola found the recital tedious. He suspected that, like her influential relatives, these love affairs were largely imaginary. But the interlude gave him an opportunity to think. He was beginning to realise that he had gravely underestimated the time required for the completion of his plan. The contradictions in Elizabeth's behaviour, the maddening alternation of invitation and resistance, could only mean one thing. Though prepared to capitulate in the end, she required

for her self-respect a prolonged and respectable seduction.

This played havoc with his time schedule. When he left her that night, he took out his pass-book and went to work on the figures. By a programme of rigorous economy exercised on his own needs (for it would be fatal to be too parsimonious with Elizabeth) he could just manage to last out for three weeks. He knew instinctively that any attempt to borrow money before the final surrender would be a mistake. Ideally, they should have been lovers for at least a week before the matter was mentioned. That gave him a fortnight to achieve his conquest, with no margin at all.

It was no easy task. Elizabeth's principles demanded that she should be not only seduced, but practically raped. If more time had been available, he would have been inclined to have simulated a loss of interest in order to force her to moderate her attitude. But he could not afford such subtleties. He had to rely exclusively on a frontal assault.

Physically, she was if anything rather stronger than he was, and appeared to derive pleasure from the protracted wrestling matches which preceded any increase in intimacy. She gave a little ground on each occasion, but it was in the nature of a voluntary withdrawal, by way of reward for his efforts and encouragement for the future. He stayed late each night, and retired to bed exhausted. But, in the end, determination triumphed. After a titanic struggle which lasted until nearly three o'clock in the morning, she capitulated. He tottered away to sleep almost immediately afterwards, very tired, but at the same time rather proud of himself. He had carried it through in ten days—four days under schedule.

Once over this obstacle, things were a little easier. Her attitude seemed to be that, now the damage had been done, she might as well enjoy it. She allowed her innate sensuality

to display itself to the full. What she had before resisted, she now solicited, even positively demanded. When she reminded Mola, as she did occasionally, of her supposedly forced surrender, it was in an affectionate and playful manner.

Mola allowed her a week to grow dependent on him. She was responding very satisfactorily to her change in status. Her discontented expression was less noticeable, she became more animated, she took more trouble with her appearance. It must have been obvious to everybody in the house that something had happened to her.

They were lying in bed one night when he first raised the question of money. He fell, deliberately, into a moody silence. Noticing a lack of response, she asked him what was the matter.

"Nothing," he said. "It is nothing at all."

"Don't be silly. There's obviously something wrong. What is it?"

"I could not tell you about it."

"Of course you can. You must."

He hedged for some time, putting up the same sham resistance against her curiosity as she had used against his attacks upon her virtue, and for the same reason. It was highly desirable for him to appear to be telling her of his financial difficulties on her own direct insistence. He finally came out with the story.

She listened to him without interruption, occasionally nodding to show that she understood a particular point. Her manner changed perceptibly as soon as money was mentioned. She became serious and concentrated. It began to occur to him that she was more intelligent than he had thought.

At the end, she lit a cigarette and propped herself up comfortably with pillows. Then she pulled on a bed-jacket,

buttoning it firmly across her dark, heavy breasts. The time for dalliance was over.

"How long do you reckon it will take," she asked, "for you to get your name on the register?"

"It's hard to say. Perhaps several months."

"How can you be sure you won't be turned down?"

"That is most unlikely. I have letters in which it is practically promised. It is simply a question of delay."

"Why can't you set up as an unregistered practitioner in the meantime?"

"That would completely ruin my chances of registration."

"So you need money to keep you for several months until your application goes through? Supposing you can't get it? What then?"

"I don't know. I should have to leave here, for one thing. Then exist as best I can."

She pondered. "I suppose . . . I might be able to help you . . . a little."

"No," he protested. "I could not think of it. That is why I did not want to tell you."

"Don't be stupid. Something will have to be done. I must say you seem to have left it rather late."

"It is true," he admitted. "I am not good at dealing with such things."

After a show of resistance, he allowed her to persuade him to accept help. "Though, mind you," she said, "it would have to be on a business footing. I couldn't afford it any other way."

"Of course."

"Perhaps the best thing would be to do it through my solicitor, Mr. Morris. He's an old friend of the family. He can attend to all the details."

"Certainly."

He thanked her profusely. Everything was going very

well indeed. The participation of a solicitor was unexpected, but did not dismay him. He was quite honest in his intention to pay back the loan.

From her description of Mr. Morris as an 'old friend of the family', he had expected a benevolent, patriarchal figure with white hair and arthritis. Instead, he found a man of just over forty, brisk, talkative, and, in some indefinable way, contemptuous. He gave the impression that this affair was so small as to be beneath his dignity, that he was only handling it as a personal favour and was keen to get it off his hands as soon as possible.

He proposed that Elizabeth should lend Mola two hundred pounds. This, he explained, would have to be realised by selling investments on which she relied for her income. Therefore, interest must be charged. The securities to be sold were mining shares which paid dividends of ten per cent, and it was only reasonable that Mola should give her a similar return. In addition to this, there was brokerage and stamp duty on the sale of the shares, together with his own fees. Mr. Mola must remember, too, that he was offering no security. . . . Mola discovered, when he worked it out afterwards, that he was being compelled to pay the equivalent of nearly fifteen per cent on his money.

Still, there was nothing to be done about it; he was in no position to argue. He consoled himself by reflecting that, once he started up in practice, twenty or thirty pounds would be neither here nor there. He signed the agreement.

It was an enormous relief to have money in the bank once again. On the other hand, he was irretrievably shackled to Elizabeth. Now that he had attained his objective, he began to find her an encumbrance. She was intolerably possessive. She was physically insatiable and her conversation turned exclusively around two or three subjects. Every now and

then she made hints about marriage, which Mola steadfastly ignored. He had decided at an early stage that the one thing he would not do was to marry Elizabeth; he would sooner starve.

After months of waiting, his registration was granted. He was notified that he was now to be permitted to practise medicine in England. Certain conditions were imposed, the most important of which was that he must not for the present engage in private practice but must work only in hospitals. This was a customary stipulation and Mola had expected it. It had the advantage of giving him an excellent excuse for living away from Elizabeth.

He parted from her on strained terms. She knew now that he would never marry her and was eager to get rid of her. But there was still the debt to be repaid. He saved what he could from his salary each month and sent it to her; he was earning less than he had hoped and could only manage to reduce the debt very gradually. Once or twice he had been ill and had fallen behind in his payments. It was in the agreement that he should pay so much per month, and whenever he defaulted she immediately countered with threats of legal action. The worst period had been just before he had come to the Royal. He had been out of work for three months and was consequently now in arrears to the tune of fifty pounds.

"So you see why it is that I must have the money," he concluded.

"Yes," said Philip absently. Though not without its comic side, Mola's story was one to arouse sympathy; it made him feel vaguely ashamed of his own good fortune. It was dreadful to think of this courteous, inoffensive little man being so tormented by fate. On the other hand—fifty pounds . . .

There were certain points which worried him. In the first place, though Mola's story sounded perfectly circumstantial and convincing, there was no absolute guarantee that it was true. Confidence tricksters were renowned for their plausibility. In the second place, supposing it *were* true, how was the debt to be paid back? On his own showing, Mola had a tendency to make his creditors work hard for their money.

Philip said: "Does Elizabeth understand the circumstances? About your being out of work and so on?"

"Certainly. I have explained to her over and over again. She says she is not interested."

"She sounds extraordinarily unreasonable."

"That is so. One has to remember that she is activated partly by malice. She has never forgiven me for leaving her." He sighed. "I think she would be only too pleased to make trouble for me. If I pay her the arrears, she cannot. And now that I have a job, I can keep up the rest of the payments."

Philip hesitated. It was hard to know what to say. He could not think of any way of voicing his doubts without being supremely offensive. Mola appeared to anticipate his difficulties. He leaned forward persuasively.

"Naturally," he said, "you wish to know how I would pay you back. I have it all planned—I will show you the figures. My salary is larger here than formerly. I can pay you five pounds each month as well as what I must pay Elizabeth. You will be repaid within a year. And, as you know, my job here is for two years."

"Yes—I see what you mean." Philip found it hard to meet Mola's eyes. For he knew what Mola had not yet even guessed, that the sordid story of deception, cruelty and lies was not yet finished. Mola would not stay for two years, he would not even stay for one. From the very moment when



he had been first employed, before he had even been given a trial, the decision had been made to dispose of him at the earliest convenient moment. Almost everybody knew it except Mola himself. The curious and profoundly disturbing aspect of the situation was that none of them—Sir Arthur, Isherwood, McBain, Maddox—seemed conscious that there was anything wrong about it. Even Philip himself had not allowed it to worry him very much. Only now did it come to him with full force that by his very knowledge he was a party to a heartless and dishonourable conspiracy.

How could he clear himself of such complicity? Once again he wondered whether he should tell Mola all he knew—once again pity and caution restrained him. The danger of speech was now much increased, since it would involve the disclosure of information given to him in confidence by Sir Arthur; such an indiscretion, if it came to light, would never be forgiven. No, the decision was not one to be taken on impulse, and certainly not at this particular time. Perhaps later, when Mola was in a less emotional mood, some hint might be given.

In the meantime, there was this question of the fifty pounds to be settled. One might as well face it—under the circumstances there was little chance of such a loan being repaid. Sorry as he was for Mola, he was not prepared to present him with the money as a gift.

Seeing his reluctance, Mola said anxiously: "If it is a question of interest——"

"No——" broke in Philip. His voice sounded sharper than he had intended and he softened it. "It's nothing to do with interest. I wouldn't dream of demanding such a thing. But I'm afraid it's impossible for me to lend you the money."

He was afraid that Mola might argue or press for explana-

tions, but he did not. He simply nodded his head sadly, as if he had expected nothing more. Philip searched for some way in which he could mitigate the effect of his refusal.

"I wonder," he said, "if you've really done everything possible to make this woman see reason. Obviously it would be much more satisfactory if she could just wait a little while, instead of you saddling yourself with another debt. Have you spoken to her recently?"

"Over the telephone—only last night. It is hopeless. As soon as she hears my voice, she flies into a rage. She says that she is coming here in a few days. If I cannot give her the money she will see the secretary of the hospital. I do not know what to do," Mola said hopelessly.

"Well, that's one thing she mustn't be allowed to do. If Froy gets hold of this . . ." A scandal of this sort, Philip was sure, would be a godsend to the authorities. It would enable them to justify Mola's removal at any moment convenient to them, on the grounds that his private life was disreputable. He thought for a moment. "Look, how would it be if I had a word with her? She might listen to sense from somebody else."

"That is very kind of you. . . ."

"It's up to you. I don't want to interfere."

"No, by no means. I am most grateful. Perhaps, as you say, you may be able to persuade her. It is, at least, a chance."

"Good. Then I'll see what I can do."

Philip's conscience began to feel a little easier. If he would not lend the money, at least he was prepared to do something, a good deal more than many people would have done in his position. This was what his self-esteem said. But his conscience also spoke, suggesting to him that his motives were by no means altruistic, and that curiosity had played a large part in his decision.

Before he went to sleep that night a third voice appeared. It was a high, thin, frightened, worried little voice, morbidly sensitive to danger. It told him that he was a very foolish young man, who ought to mind his own business.

## Chapter Ten

THIS LAST VIEW OF THE SITUATION was shared by Pamela. When he had finished telling her about it, she shook her head disapprovingly.

"I don't know——" she said. "I don't like it."

"I don't really *like* it, myself."

"Then is it necessary to get involved? You're in such a very vulnerable position, you know. Being associated with an affair of this sort could do you a lot of harm if it came out."

"I wouldn't say I was exactly associated. I'm to act as a sort of mediator."

"If anything unpleasant came out, nobody would care what capacity you were acting in. The talk would be that you were somehow mixed up in it."

"But surely," protested Philip, "I can't let myself be influenced by gossip of that sort."

She looked at him seriously. "Darling," she said, "it's no use blinding yourself to the facts. You know as well as I do how much gossip matters in a place like this. It shouldn't, we know. You can say, if you like, that you'll take the risk. But don't pretend there isn't a risk."

"The trouble is," he said unhappily, "that I'm more or less committed now."

"Couldn't you say you'd changed your mind?"

"Hardly."

"Of course," she reminded him, "it's entirely up to you. I'm merely giving my opinion."

"I can understand how you feel. But there is another side."

"Oh, I dare say he can make out a case for himself," she said.

"But you're not impressed?"

"Frankly, no. He may have an explanation for each incident, but somehow the picture as a whole worries me. It's—squalid."

"He's been very shabbily treated—you can't deny that."

"Not by you."

"That's hardly the point. I agree that I haven't any *personal* obligation towards him. But somehow I feel there is an obligation just the same."

"What sort of an obligation?"

"It's hard to express it without sounding pompous. It's partly on behalf of the profession and partly, too . . . well, because I've been lucky and he hasn't. Don't you feel you owe something to people who haven't been so fortunate as yourself?"

"Do you suppose he would help you if the positions were reversed?"

"I don't think that matters, really."

"In other words, you don't really care about him at all. It's just your own conscience. Though why your conscience should be bothering you . . ."

He could see how difficult it was for her to understand. She could not see it as anything else but an affair between individuals. Like most women, her sense of duty diminished rapidly with distance. To her own family and those whom she loved her loyalty was total and unquestioned; there was no limit to the demands they might make on her. To them she gave her whole heart, and little was left over for others.

The problems of a troubled world she comprehended intellectually, as abstractions—they aroused no true emotional response. It was plain that she was quite out of sympathy with Philip's attitude towards the Mola question. He must resign himself to carrying through his part in the affair alone.

He awaited his meeting with Elizabeth in some apprehension. There was always a hope at the back of his mind that she might refuse, thereby setting him free from his promise. But Mola reported to him that she had received the proposition willingly, almost with eagerness. Perhaps she also was curious. It was arranged that she should call at the hospital one evening to see him.

When she arrived, Philip was at first overcome by the sensation of having met her before. It was a few minutes before he realised that this was an illusion, generated by the fact that she fitted so accurately into Mola's description of her. She was presumably in her late thirties, and looked it. Her body was thick and heavily corseted. She wore a tweed suit which was slightly too small for her. Her black hair, the best point in her appearance, was beginning to show occasional streaks of grey. Just above her broad, fleshy mouth there were the beginnings of what would one day be a noticeable moustache.

All in all, she was not an encouraging subject for diplomacy. She had no ease of manner, and her whole attitude was one of determined obstinacy and suspicion. She did not respond to Philip's smile of greeting, and sat down as if fully prepared for the chair to capsize beneath her. She refused a glass of sherry, but accepted a cigarette, which she inhaled deeply and greedily, blowing out the smoke through clenched, discoloured teeth.

Philip said: "I suppose Mola told you why I asked you to come and see me?"

"Up to a point. I gathered you were going to make me some sort of a proposition."

"You could call it that. What I intended——"

She interrupted. "Just a moment. Before we start, I'd like to get a few things clear. I think I'm entitled to know where you stand."

"Where I stand?" asked Philip in perplexity.

"Yes, where you stand," she repeated firmly. "Where do you come into all this? What's your interest?"

"I haven't any special interest. There's nothing at all sinister about it. I'm simply trying to help a friend."

"He doesn't owe you money as well?"

"No."

"Because if he does, I think you ought to tell me about it. I shall find out anyway."

Philip kept his temper with difficulty. "I can only assure you that I'm telling the truth. I have no axe to grind at all."

She appeared to be only partially satisfied. "That's what he said. But I may as well tell you that I didn't believe him."

"That doesn't surprise me. If I may say so, you seem to be an extraordinarily suspicious person."

"You would be," she said darkly, "if you'd had to deal with him for as long as I have. He's as artful as a basketful of monkeys. He'll say anything that suits him. I've no doubt he's spun you a few yarns to get you interested."

"If so," said Philip, "you can always correct me, from your own knowledge of the facts. So far as I can see, the main point is that he owes you fifty pounds——"

"He owes me a great deal more than that," she broke in indignantly. "You see—I knew he'd been lying to you——"

"Just a moment—just a moment. I know all about that. You didn't allow me to finish. Fifty pounds is the

amount of arrears which you're demanding. Is that correct?"

"Yes," she said sulkily, "and I want it now. It should have been paid months ago."

"I appreciate that," said Philip soothingly, "and I can see why you're impatient. All the same, you must be reasonable. He only stopped paying because he was out of work."

"That's hardly my fault."

"Nor his. Things are difficult in medicine nowadays. He's had a pretty tough time."

"Him!" she exploded in disgust. "What about me? I'm not a rich woman, you know. I lent him my savings, out of the kindness of my heart, and he's given me nothing but trouble ever since. I tell you, Mr. Selwood," she said earnestly, "I curse the day I ever laid eyes on that man."

"Oh, come——"

She swept aside Philip's attempt at intervention. "You don't know—you simply haven't any idea. When I met him, he was down and out. He couldn't even pay his rent. I took pity on him, fool that I was. And this is what I get for it. Oh," she said bitterly, "I know what you think—what he means you to think—that I'm just a mercenary woman. But there's a great deal more to it than that. I don't suppose he told you that he seduced me?"

"As a matter of fact, he did."

"There you are! What sort of man would tell another man about a thing like that? He bragged about it, I shouldn't wonder. And well he might. I'm not the sort of woman who gives herself to anybody, I can tell you that. It took him a long time—and then it was only with all his lies and promises. . . ." Righteous indignation turned suddenly to self-pity. "I trusted him, you see—that was the trouble. I never suspected the sort of person he was." She looked at Philip intently, her lips moist, her bosom

heaving. "You don't know what these foreigners are like about sex," she said. "Some of the things he made me do . . . I couldn't tell a living soul."

She told him enough, however, to embarrass him acutely. It would not have been so bad if she had been younger or better-looking, but she had reached the stage when it was unpleasant to imagine her in connection with sexual activity. Moreover, she had a way of investing the most commonplace happenings with a perverted and scabrous interpretation. He let her proceed, with the idea of checking what she told him against Mola's own story, but he soon found that hearing this second account made the picture, if anything, more confusing. The incidents were the same, but the construction placed upon them was so different that it was hard to realise that the same events were being described. It was plain, too, that Elizabeth believed in the truth of her story just as much as Mola had believed in his.

". . . and after all he said, what he was after was my money. Nothing else. He didn't give a damn about me. He just intended to play on my good nature."

It was time, Philip thought, to introduce a more realistic note. "Nevertheless," he pointed out, "the transaction seems to have taken place on a very business-like basis."

"Did he want me to *give* it to him?" she asked indignantly.

"You almost talk as if you had."

"Would he have found anyone else to lend it?"

"Perhaps not," admitted Philip.

"There you are, then. He'd have been out on the street if it hadn't been for me. I didn't want to lend it myself, but he begged me, and I took pity on him. I had to sell out my investments. It was an act of pure kindness."

"At fifteen per cent interest."

"That's a lie! It was just over ten. And I was getting that from the shares. I couldn't afford to lend it at less.



What with one thing and another, I'm losing money even if he paid up. And now, with him defaulting like this . . . What's more, the shares have nearly doubled in value since I sold them."

"You can hardly blame Mola for that."

"All right," she agreed. "But I won't be spoken to as if I was a swindler. I'm the one with the grievance. He deserted me. . . . By rights, after the way he'd taken advantage of me, he should have married me. But trust him not to mention that."

"Do you want to marry him?"

"Not if he were the last man on earth!" she retorted.

"Well then . . ."

"It's not that. What I'm saying is, he never even asked me. I was made use of. Well, I'm not having it any more. He must pay the money. It's only what I'm legally entitled to."

"You can't get blood out of a stone," Philip pointed out. "At the present moment, he hasn't got it."

"He must find it somewhere," she said obstinately.

"But where?"

"That's nothing to do with me. It's his worry."

"He's not trying to avoid payment, you know. Now he's got a job he's prepared to pay off the arrears in instalments, if you'll only let him."

"I've heard that tale before. I gave him the benefit of the doubt, and he let me down."

"Only because he was out of work."

She was silent for a moment. Then, as if prepared to change her mind, she said: "You feel pretty confident that he'd pay up on the instalments?"

She was looking at Philip searchingly. He saw, rather late, that she was leading him into an awkward position. He said uneasily: "Yes. I think so."

She smiled grimly. "Then why didn't you lend him the fifty pounds yourself? I know he asked you."

Philip found, to his annoyance, that he was blushing. "That's quite another matter."

She gave a short laugh. "I'll say it is." She sat back in her chair with the triumphant expression of one who has scored a point. Philip had to admit that her smugness was not without justification. Diplomacy, so far, had proved singularly unsuccessful. Despite her manifest vulgarity and ignorance, she was not, he reflected, an easy woman to get the better of. He determined to try a new method of attack.

"Are you sure," he said, "that you're being quite honest with yourself about this?"

"What do you mean by that?" she asked sharply.

"I was referring to your motives. I don't propose to discuss what happened in the first place—I wasn't there. But at the present moment . . . You put up a fine show of being aggrieved and wanting your rights, and so on. Perhaps you believe it. But, to an outsider like myself, your attitude suggests a certain amount of personal malice."

He had, if nothing else, aroused her from her complacency. Her eyes bulged with rage.

"Are you suggesting that I'm jealous?"

"Jealous?" said Philip, baffled by this unexpected twist in the conversation.

"Of whatever little trollop he's sleeping with at the moment. I can imagine how he's carrying on with those nurses."

"I can assure you he's doing nothing of the kind. He hasn't time, for one thing."

She laughed shortly. "He'll always find time for that. I know him better than you do. Well, he can go to bed with as many as he likes—I don't care. But I'm damned if I'll stand for him spending my money on them!" Suddenly she

seemed to lose whatever degree of self-control she had so far retained. "You can tell him this—that if he doesn't pay up within the next fortnight I'll have the police on him!"

"Don't be silly," said Philip impatiently.

"I mean it!"

"No doubt you do. But arrears of debt isn't a criminal offence. The most you can do is to take a civil action."

"Then I'll do that. I'll see my solicitor."

"I should think about it first. It'll cost you something in legal fees alone."

"He'll have to pay those. He's in the wrong."

"But he won't be able to. If he can't pay you, how the devil can he pay your solicitor?"

"Never you mind," she said darkly. "Leave me to worry about that. Whatever it costs me, I'm prepared to go through with it. And it'll finish him—make no mistake about that."

"Oh, I don't know so much. There's nothing really discreditable involved. It'll be an embarrassment, certainly——"

"Embarrassment!" she said with venom. "I'll give him embarrassment! If this comes to court, I shan't mince words, believe me. I'll give them everything. Then we'll see what happens." She added mysteriously: "There are certain things you don't know about Mr. Mola."

"Such as?"

She looked down for a moment, as if scrutinising with unusual care the clasp of her handbag. When she looked up again, Philip recognised with apprehension the smile he had seen on her face once before. She was about to score off him again.

"I don't suppose he ever got around to telling you that he was a drug addict?" she said.

## *Chapter Eleven*

"No," SAID MOLA, "it is not true." His face was deathly white. He stared at Philip with agonised, wide-open eyes, as if determined, by sheer force of will, to induce belief. "I swear it to you."

Philip frowned. "Then why——?"

"I will tell you why. It is like all her lies—there is just enough behind it to make it damaging. The facts are these. For some time while I was in the camp I was, as I have told you, in great pain. When I became hospital orderly I had access to various drugs; not the usual narcotics such as morphine—they were very careful about those—but such things as barbiturates. I found it impossible to sleep without something, and I used to take whatever I could get. I became, to some extent, addicted. I think you will agree that such a thing might have happened to anybody?"

"Yes," said Philip unhappily. "I suppose it could."

"Believe me, my friend, if you had been in my place, you would have done the same. You cannot know what it was like," he said. It was impossible to doubt his sincerity. Beads of perspiration appeared on his face at the memory of it. "To lie awake at night in pain is bad enough when you are at home, in a comfortable bed, with friends within call. But in the camp——" He shuddered. "Unless you have experienced it, you could never understand. It is not only the discomfort, the imprisonment, the starvation. It is not only the fact that, so far as you know, there is no hope, no end to it all but death. No, the worst thing of all is the dreadful loneliness. You come to loathe your fellow-prisoners almost as much as your guards, and you feel that they loathe you. There is no humanity, no sympathy. Your pain means nothing to the others. If you scream, they curse

you for disturbing their few hours of sleep. If you die, it is nothing. They may even be secretly pleased—there will be a little more room in the hut. In civilised society you are brought up with the idea that man has a responsibility towards his neighbour. You think it is a law of nature, but it is not. It can be lost. And when it is lost, you are an animal, worse than an animal. Only one thing is left, the instinct to survive.” He took out a handkerchief with a trembling hand and mopped the sweat from his face. Then he said with a sort of pride: “I am not ashamed of the barbiturates. I could not have lived without them.”

Philip listened to him in profound discomfiture. He felt exhausted by the emotional tension which Mola communicated; and in addition to this was the experience of being confronted for the first time by moral issues of bewildering complexity. Certain facts about his own life were being gradually made clear to him. The problems with which he grappled so seriously were, comparatively speaking, no more than trifles. The stable, confident society in which he lived, had made all the big decisions for him before he was born. It had told him categorically that some things were good and others evil, leaving to his own judgment certain delicate and borderline questions which were of infrequent occurrence. It was justified in doing so, since, with the background provided, it was indeed correct to say that one should not murder or steal or make love to a woman for money or seek escape from trouble with the aid of narcotics. But once that background was destroyed, things could be very different. Circumstances might arise which made such acts, if not praiseworthy, at least permissible. He was shocked to find that his basic moral values, which he had always looked upon as absolute, were in large part conditional on his living in a particular social organisation.

To be jolted out of his complacency was unpleasant. He

found himself thinking how much better it would have been for him if he had had no dealings with Mola at all. He was tempted to wash his hands of the whole matter. But as soon as the thought came into his mind he knew it could not be done. What was it that Mola had said? 'You are brought up with the idea that man has a responsibility towards his neighbour.' That was true. It was possible to live in happy ignorance of the existence of certain responsibilities, but once they were shown to you, you could not easily forget them. On the other hand, what was the reasonable limit of his responsibility towards Mola? That was a problem in itself.

"And what happened," he asked, "after you left the camp?"

"It was different then. In the camp I had not cared what harm the drug did to me, since it prevented me from going mad. When I was released, it was necessary to stop."

"And you did?"

"Yes," said Mola solemnly. "Yes, I did. It was very bad at first, but the Army hospital was good and they were very kind to me."

"You told the authorities?"

"Yes. In confidence, you understand. I was in hospital for three months, on the cure. Then I was passed fit. Later on, my heart gave way and I was invalided out."

"You never started again?"

Mola shook his head. "No. Once was enough. Believe me, my friend, it is not an experience one wishes to repeat."

"How did Elizabeth get to know about it?"

Mola sighed ruefully. "I was very foolish. It was at the time when there was so much delay about my registration. I was very worried. I wondered if the authorities had perhaps disclosed about this business of the drugs to the

General Medical Council. I discussed the possibility with her."

"Has she ever threatened you like this before?"

"Yes," he said. "Once or twice. But until now she has not told anybody. At least, not that I know of."

"You think she might?"

Mola made a helpless gesture with his hands. "She is the sort of woman who might do anything, if she fancied she had a grievance. As you have no doubt seen for yourself, she is by no means easy to understand. At one moment she is all calculation. In this mood she is greedy and repellent, but she will be reasonable if it is to her advantage. Then something is said, something perhaps quite unimportant—and suddenly she is hysterical, she is vindictive, there is no knowing what she may do."

"I warned her that she had no proof. You could bring an action for slander."

Mola shook his head. "She knows I would not. Whether I won or lost, I should still be ruined."

He relapsed into melancholy silence. Philip, too, brooded unhappily. Some aspects of his own position were beginning to cause him anxiety. He was, up to a point, in charge of Mola; he was expected to exert a certain supervision over his work. An accusation had been made to him—an accusation of considerable gravity. For any doctor to take drugs was bad enough, but an anæsthetist, a man whose whole skill rested on judging the borderline between safety and danger in an unconscious patient! It was true that Mola had denied the charge, but he could hardly have been expected to do otherwise. His denial, when one thought about it, meant nothing one way or the other.

It was an appalling dilemma. Looked at from one point of view, the matter should be immediately reported. If there was any truth in Elizabeth's statement, Mola was a

dangerous man, a potential killer. By maintaining silence one might endanger the lives of innocent people. With so much at stake, the ordinary considerations of decency and respect for another person's confidences could hardly be expected to apply. It could be argued that there was a greater duty than that of friendship, the duty to those whose lives were committed to his charge.

There need be no great difficulty, even. Nothing definite need be said. The merest hint to Sir Arthur, and everything, he knew, would be swiftly and tactfully taken care of. His own name would never be mentioned. There would be no accusations, no unpleasant arguments, no reproaches. Mola would simply be removed.

Removed . . . which meant, in cruder language, sacked, thrown out, without references, without money or a home. Since no accusation would be made, Mola would have no chance to defend himself. He would be out of work again, and heavily in debt to a woman from whom, Philip was now convinced, no mercy could be expected. It was no melodramatic exaggeration to say that it would be the end of him.

If he knew that Elizabeth was telling the truth, such tragic consequences should be accepted. But he had no proof whatever beyond the assertion of a woman activated by malice and of obviously unstable personality. To damn a man on such evidence was unthinkable.

As Philip made his decision, he was conscious, for the first time, of a gulf between himself and the organisation with which he had been, up to now, so happily identified. He knew that if he had asked any of the great men of his world how he should act in such an eventuality, they would have answered as with one voice. Clutching their lapels, fiddling importantly with their spectacles, they would have said that the integrity of the profession must be guarded as a precious



heritage, that the doctor must be, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion—and a great many more of the sort of statements which are true enough if you have a job and a house and a family and a few thousand pounds life insurance. Face to face with Mola, Philip found it impossible to accept them as valid. It was a shock comparable to the one he had experienced as a schoolboy when he had first discovered that his parents were not infallible, but only confused, struggling human beings like himself. He had reached another stage in the process of growing up.

He said to Mola: "Well, there it is. I don't think there's anything more to say. I'm sorry I couldn't help you more."

"She gives me two weeks, you said?"

"Yes."

"I cannot do it," he said despairingly. As if feeling the necessity of making one last effort, however hopeless, he said: "I suppose—it is still impossible for you to . . . lend me the money?"

"I'm afraid so."

Mola stood up. With pathetic dignity he made a jerky little bow and held out his hand to Philip. "I wish to thank you most sincerely," he said. "You have been very kind."

## *Chapter Twelve*

PHILIP WORRIED ABOUT MOLA for the next few days. But there is a limit to the interest one can take in another's troubles, and as time went by he thought about the matter less and less. He justified himself in this by reflecting that his conscience was clear; he had done everything that could be expected of him—by ordinary standards, a great deal more. The only further thing he could have done was to lend the money, and that, under the circumstances, was

hardly a reasonable demand. In this belief he was vigorously supported by Pamela.

His attention was also distracted by matters of more direct personal concern. The pace of life at the Royal, which had eased a little recently after the first hectic weeks of his appointment, was beginning to accelerate again. Nor was this merely the normal phasic increase in work after a temporary lull. It was a more distressing, though almost equally familiar, phenomenon. News of it travelled quickly through the hospital to serve as a topic of conversation in the residents' quarters, in the theatre changing-room, in the bar of the club where most of the consultants went for lunch; it was discussed, in all its implications, amid the clicking of knitting-needles by the older sisters as they sat before their television set in the Nurses' Home. Sir Arthur, they said sympathetically, was having 'a bad run'.

Surgery, like most activities in which a variety of factors takes a part, is to some extent dependent on the laws of chance. It involves the taking of calculated risks. Usually these risks will produce results more or less as estimated, but at other times a certain freakish element appears which upsets all calculation. Things may go well, so astonishingly well that the surgeon, unless he is very experienced and clear-sighted, begins to wonder whether he has discovered some secret, whether his hands have become endowed with a mystic and extraordinary skill. On the other hand, things may go badly, and then it is as if he is bewitched by a malignant spell. Vitality seems to wither at his touch, he becomes sickeningly familiar with complications which previously he had only read about in books, and scoffed at as the products of inferior treatment. He is like a gambler betting feverishly against a stream of ill-luck, watching helplessly at each spin of the wheel for the ball to drop into the slot which leads to the post-mortem room. He fights against

panic, which is never far away. He fancies that his practice is falling off, that the practitioners are beginning to steer clear of him. He sleeps badly, quarrels with his wife, snaps at his registrar and house surgeon. His arteries harden and his blood pressure rises. It is probable that each of these episodes shortens his life by several years.

Benson-Gray was a very experienced man. He had been through innumerable bad runs in his time. They were an occupational hazard like silicosis to the miner or malaria to the planter. At the beginning of the run he would talk about them in this way, with rueful amusement, comparing them with similar occurrences in the past. But after a while he would grow impatient. This one was going on far too long, it was getting beyond a joke. Ultimately, he would reach the third stage, the dangerous stage: he would become tense, silent, nervous, and extremely touchy. He would accept news of further disasters with nothing more than a brisk nod of the head. It was an indiscretion to so much as mention the word 'death' in his presence.

For Philip it was a difficult time. The recurrent crises which occurred meant a great deal of extra work and worry, apart from the extra tact required in handling Sir Arthur. It was hardly surprising that Mola should sink into the background of his thoughts. He watched the little anaesthetist more carefully than before, but there was no sign of abnormality in his behaviour which might suggest that Elizabeth's accusation could be justified. He worked well, he was reliable and unobtrusive. His manner was detached and withdrawn, his face even paler, more pinched than usual, and he rarely smiled; but that was easily accounted for by his troubles. Philip grew so used to seeing Mola looking like this that it ceased to make any impression on him. He was like a man who walks busily to work each day past the spot where an unexploded bomb lies buried.

The bomb has been there for a long time and nothing has happened. He takes it for granted that nothing *will* happen. He has adjusted himself to the bomb. He has, as it were, come to an arrangement with it, to live and let live. Or so he thinks. For the assumption is only legitimate if he knows what is happening inside the bomb. And he does not.



# **Part II**



## *Chapter One*

THE TELEPHONE RANG.

Philip awakened reluctantly. He fumbled for the switch of his bedside light and picked up the telephone.

"Yes?"

A thin, tussy voice said: "This is Night Sister speaking, Mr. Selwood. Would you mind coming down to casualty? There's been a road accident."

"Why don't you ring Mr. Greenwood?" asked Philip irritably. "He's the house surgeon on duty."

"He's already down here. He's sewing up a scalp. He asked me to ring you. There's a case he'd like your advice on."

"Oh—all right" Greenwood was a sensible, conscientious boy. If he was worried, there was something to be worried about. "What's the time?"

"Just after two o'clock."

"God! . . ." He muttered petulantly: "This is a hell of a time for people to be driving about in cars."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing . . . nothing."

He put the receiver down. There was a temptation to lie back, to remain between the sheets for just another minute until he had time to wake up properly, but he dared not succumb to it. It was only too easy to fall asleep again. He heaved himself out of bed, put on his slippers and dressing-gown, combed his hair, and made his way towards the casualty department.

As he passed along the corridors, the hospital was asleep. The wards were dark and shadowy; on the night nurse's



desk was a small pool of light from a reading-lamp partially shrouded in green cloth. The nurses themselves moved on tiptoe, talking to each other in whispered sentences. Only an occasional snore, a moan, a voice muttering meaningless syllables in sleep, punctuated the silence of the night.

In the casualty department, two floors below, there was, by contrast, bedlam. It was like passing from a discreet, luxurious restaurant through the swing doors leading into the kitchens. The whole department was ablaze with light. The nurses scurried to and fro, banging dishes and receivers, throwing instruments in and out of the steriliser, talking to each other. Night Sister, an emotional woman weighed down by the responsibilities of her position, stood in the office, wringing her hands and trying to stave off an attack of panic. By the porter's desk near the street door were gathered policemen, ambulance men, and one or two tousled participants in the accident who, their minor injuries having been treated, were making statements to the police. The patients who had not yet been dealt with sat around in the dressing-room, their faces smeared with blood, their hair clotted, their arms in slings. Most of them were talking at the tops of their voices. The air was sickly with the smell of blood and vomit. Somebody was groaning behind a screen.

In the small operating theatre Greenwood, a stolid, pink-faced young man, was battling his way through the minor surgery. Philip did not disturb him. He said to Sister: "What does it all add up to?"

"There were two cars—it seems they went into each other almost head-on. Most of them have only minor injuries. There's one man with concussion, but nothing serious—he's been sent up to the ward." She paused, jerking her head in the direction of the screen from which the groans were emanating. "It's the abdominal that Mr. Greenwood was worried about."

Philip frowned. Night Sister always contrived to annoy him. She had a vulgar and irritating habit of referring to patients by their affected organs—"the liver", "the femur", "the pulmonary", "the abdominal".

"The what?" he asked irritably.

Night Sister was used to doctors being irascible in the middle of the night. Her policy was to ignore it. "The woman in there. Mr. Greenwood thinks she has an abdominal injury."

"I'd better see her."

"You won't find her very co-operative," said Sister, with meaning.

Philip went behind the screen. Lying on the couch was a woman in her late thirties. She was thin and sallow, with coarse blonde hair growing out black at the roots, and she was dirty. It was not simply the mud of the streets, acquired as a result of the accident; covering most parts of her body was a thin grey film, ingrained into all the tiny cracks and crevices of her skin, discolouring her make-up and adding a black border to the red varnish on her finger-nails. She looked repulsive, degenerate, and at the same time desperately ill. Her face was waxy, her lips dry, her forehead damp with sweat. Every so often she would give a cry of pain and writhe about the couch.

Philip looked at her case history. On the top of the card, in Greenwood's neat handwriting, was written  $C_2H_5OH$ .

He said to Sister: "She's been drinking?"

"They all have. Her husband was driving one of the cars."

"How's he?"

"He got away with bruises. He's outside at the moment, talking to the police."

Philip felt the woman's pulse. It was fast and thready. He looked at the grubby skin and soiled underclothes. "I

won't waste time here," he said. "Get her into the ward and undress her. I'll see her when she's settled down a bit."

He walked through to Greenwood.

"Oh, hello," said Greenwood. "Sorry to get you up. What do you think of her?"

"She's not so good. But I wouldn't like to commit myself until I've seen her in the ward. It's hell let loose down here."

"Yes, isn't it," said Greenwood cheerfully. Philip realised that Greenwood was enjoying himself.

"How are you doing in here?" he asked.

"Almost finished."

"Perhaps you might take some blood from her for grouping. She's liable to need a transfusion."

"O.K."

"There's nothing else you want me to see?"

"Not really. It all looks much worse than it is."

As Philip left the operating theatre, Sister said: "That's the husband."

She pointed to a middle-aged, plethoric man in a shabby camel-hair coat, talking volubly to an unresponsive policeman. His consonants were a little slurred, his sense of balance slightly less than perfect.

"Out of the blue—absolutely, literally, out of the blue. No signs, no nothing. I tried to swerve and there I was—over the white line——" he was explaining.

"Tell him," said Philip, "that I'll talk to him upstairs."

The door swung behind him and he was back in the quiet and the darkness. The silenced lift took him up from the basement, depositing him with a sigh, an exhalation of breath, at the third floor. From either side of the corridor the openings of the wards gave out an atmosphere of mystery and menace. He began to feel very lonely and

sorry for himself. It was really too much, after a hard day. The whole world slept and took its ease—only he, Philip Selwood, had to stay awake, and work, and take responsible decisions.

He came to the female emergency ward and sat down in the office. The ward nurse heard him and tiptoed from her desk. She was a small, plump girl, and, in her uniform, in the semi-darkness, she looked pretty. Probably, Philip reminded himself, she would hardly be worth a second glance by day and in her ordinary clothes. He did not recollect having seen her before.

"Is there anyone you want to see, Mr. Selwood?"

"No, thanks. I'm just waiting for the emergency."

"You don't want me to get Sister?"

"God forbid."

She giggled. It was a mistake, Philip knew, to say things like that. It would be all over the Nurses' Home tomorrow.

She stood indecisively in the doorway. It was not clear whether she wanted to go or stay. Nor was Philip very definite as to which he wanted her to do. But his fatigue and loneliness suddenly made her look extraordinarily desirable. As she moved to go, he said: "I suppose you're pretty busy?"

"Yes." She put her hand up to her hair in embarrassment. "When we're taking in . . ."

"Are you ready for the woman to come up?"

"Almost."

"She won't be here for five minutes."

It was an absurd, banal conversation. There was nothing else to say, no way of making close contact. This was what the night could do to you. It could rob you of the daylight world and leave you shipwrecked on an island of darkness, crying in your heart for the sound of a voice, the touch of a hand, no matter whose. . . .

Perhaps there was something in the way he looked at her which she found upsetting.

She said: "Do you mind if I leave you, Mr. Selwood?" She spoke timidly, obviously anxious not to give offence. The very deference was in itself curiously offensive, as if she found his company disagreeable but was afraid to show it. "I must see that the bed's ready."

"Of course."

The nurse went back into the ward. Philip was left feeling unreasonably annoyed with her. The spell was broken. She was nothing but an ordinary, empty-headed, and not especially pretty little girl whom he had made the subject of a quite impracticable fantasy. He was surprised and shocked at himself.

He sat in the office for some time. Presently he heard the trolley pass the door of the office and go into the side ward where the empty bed was waiting. There were the sounds of muttered voices, of squeaking springs. Then the trolley passed the door again, going towards the corridor.

Night Sister came into the office.

"She's ready now, Mr. Selwood."

He went into the side ward. There were two beds, one of which was empty. In the other lay the woman he had seen down in the casualty department. She looked quite different. The clean sheets, the shaded light, the removal of the filthy, blood-stained clothes, had succeeded in rendering her an object of pity rather than of revulsion. Now that she was away from the excitement and pandemonium she had become quieter. But still, incessantly, she moaned with pain. Her pulse was no better than it had been when she was downstairs.

It was possible now to examine her properly. She was able to answer simple questions. The pain was constant, it was agonising, it was worst beneath her left ribs but was

moving all over her stomach and into her shoulder. Her abdominal muscles were rigid.

Sister was in the office.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"Ruptured spleen, I should think," he said. "Ruptured something, anyway. We'll have to open her. How soon can I have a theatre?"

"I'll tell theatre nurse right away. It'll be about half an hour, I should say."

"Where's Mr. Greenwood?"

"In the lab.—doing the blood grouping."

"Could you let him know about this? He can put up the transfusion in the theatre."

"And Dr. Mola?"

"Yes. Tell him we hope to start about three o'clock."

"I should think nurse could manage that. Are you going to stay here?"

"I might as well."

"I'll see you get a cup of coffee. Oh, and by the way—what about the husband?"

"I'll see him now. Where is he?"

"In the waiting-room."

Sister went off to the telephone. Philip opened the door of the waiting-room. The husband was pacing up and down. His belted overcoat was open to reveal a blue worsted suit with a chalk stripe. The stripe was a little too thick, the material a little too thin, to suggest either taste or quality. He wore brown shoes with pointed toes.

He was not drunk, but at the same time not completely sober. His face was flushed, his eyes bloodshot, his manner excitable and aggressive.

On hearing the door open, he stopped his pacing and turned to face Philip. Before Philip could introduce himself he asked: "Are you the doctor?"

There was something offensive and peremptory about his tone. "Yes," replied Philip. "You are Mr. . . .?"

"Weston," snapped the man. "Sidney Weston." He spoke as if the disclosure of his Christian name would somehow identify him. Was it possible, Philip wondered, that he was a person of consequence? He would have liked to ask the famous question: 'Excuse me, but are you anyone in particular?' But Mr. Weston forestalled him.

"Excuse my asking," he said, "but what exact position in the hospital do you occupy?"

"I am the Resident Surgical Registrar—if that means anything to you."

Mr. Weston nodded. "I understand. As a matter of fact, I know a good deal about hospitals." He made this last statement sound like something in the nature of a threat. "Could you tell me what you think of her?"

"I'm afraid," said Philip, "that she's seriously ill. I presume that she must have had a heavy blow on the abdomen. There are signs of internal bleeding."

Mr. Weston nodded again, briskly. "That was my feeling about it."

Philip suppressed his growing irritation. He reminded himself that the man must be under a great strain. Perhaps he was the sort of person who always behaved badly in difficult situations.

"She'll require operation as soon as possible. I've arranged to take her along to the theatre in about half an hour's time."

Mr. Weston made no immediate comment. He took one hand out of his pocket and fingered his stubbly chin, regarding Philip from beneath contracted brows like some bleary-eyed Napoleon. Finally he said: "Is there any possibility of a private room?"

"She's in what amounts to a private room already,"

said Philip. "There's nobody else in that side ward."

"Yes—but that's not quite what I meant. You have a private block here, haven't you?"

"Oh yes."

"Couldn't she be transferred there?" He added grandiosely: "I'm not concerned about expense."

Philip looked at the shoes, the suit, the cheap gunmetal cigarette-case protruding from the pocket of the double-breasted waistcoat.

"Certainly," he said, "if there's a vacant bed. It's quite all right to me. But, in fairness to you, I think I should tell you what's involved. The room alone is fifteen guineas a week. I should have to call in my chief, Sir Arthur Benson-Gray, to carry out the operation. His fees, for a procedure of this sort, are usually in the region of a hundred guineas. With X-rays and so on, it should work out at about two hundred."

"I see. Yes." Mr. Weston's enthusiasm was noticeably damped. He seemed to determine on another line of attack. "Well—look here, Doctor—this is a pretty serious case, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What I mean is—no reflection on your professional skill and so on, but—as you say yourself, this is a tough job. Requires experience, I should imagine. Might it not be advisable to get Sir Arthur in anyway—I mean, without her being a private patient?"

Any sympathy that Philip might have felt for Mr. Weston had by now completely disappeared. The fellow's impudence was beyond all bounds.

"I'm afraid," he said coldly, "that you will have to leave that decision to me. I should explain that I am Sir Arthur's first assistant and that he leaves me in charge to deal with night emergencies, presumably because he considers me



competent to do so. I haven't the remotest intention of disturbing him unless I consider it necessary."

Mr. Weston scowled. "Or unless I'm prepared to tip up two hundred quid?"

"That's quite another matter. Under the terms of my contract I am not allowed to engage in private practice. I should then be forced to call in someone else."

Mr. Weston rammed his hands back into his pockets. "My wife," he said sullenly, "means a great deal to me."

"I understand that." Philip's tone softened. "And I can assure you we shall do our very best for her. For your part, I think you should try to give us a little more of your confidence."

"All right," said Mr. Weston gracelessly. "I suppose you'd better get on with it." As Philip prepared to leave, he asked: "What do you think her chances are? Do you think she'll live?"

"I hope so. It isn't possible to say just yet."

Weston grunted resignedly, as if he had expected some such unsatisfactory answer. His truculence gave way abruptly to self-pity. "This is a hell of a business—a hell of a business." He shook his head in bewilderment. "It happened so damn quickly. It wasn't my fault, you know—I swear it wasn't. This chap came straight at me. I moved over the white line to miss him; then he pulled over too and ran slap into me. Well, I ask you——" His hands spread out in supplication, his eyes bulged forward in the intensity of his emotion. "How could I help being on the wrong side of the road? Where else could I be?" His indignation died. He was suddenly hopeless, pathetic, the underdog. "But you just try and get the police to believe that. If you take a few drinks, you're finished as far as they're concerned. They won't even bloody well listen to you." An idea seemed to strike him, a chance of salvation.

"Look, how would it be if you went down and had a word with the police? You could tell them you'd been talking to me, and that I was perfectly sober, and that——"

"I'm sorry," broke in Philip curtly. "I'm afraid that's nothing to do with me. I'm not a police surgeon." He turned to leave. "Perhaps you'll excuse me."

The man looked at him resentfully, but said nothing. Philip walked back to the office and lit another cigarette. Mr. Weston had ruffled him. He hated rudeness, particularly when directed against patients or their relatives, and he was angry with Mr. Weston for having provoked him to it. There was something false and repellent about the man. Philip suspected that most of Weston's anxiety was on his own account. His bombastic attitude, his endeavours to extort special privileges by bluff, were not suggestive of genuine grief. It was an attitude one learnt to know, the product of conscience—like a bad mother hysterical over the illness of a neglected child.

Philip sat in the office, drinking the coffee which the nurse had brought to him, until he heard the patient being wheeled out to the theatre. He finished his coffee, stubbed out his cigarette, and followed.

## *Chapter Two*

IN THE SURGEON'S ROOM OF THE THEATRE Greenwood was waiting, already changed. Philip slipped off his pyjamas and put on the cotton vest and trousers which had been laid out for him.

He said to Greenwood: "Is Mola here?"

"Yes. He's in the anæsthetic room, tinkering with his machine." A frown crossed Greenwood's usually placid features. "He looks pretty ghastly these days."

Philip tied on his mask. "He's never looked very healthy, even at the best of times. And at three o'clock in the morning . . ."

Greenwood shook his head slowly. "I think it's a bit more than that. I've noticed a difference in these last two weeks. I think he's awfully worried."

"Perhaps," said Philip impatiently. So far as he was concerned, the Mola affair was finished. He had done his best. He could not afford to allow his conscience to be aroused again at this late date. "I expect he has his troubles, like the rest of us." He spoke in a tone which abruptly terminated the discussion. "Have you got the blood?"

"Yes. It's in the anæsthetic room. Shall I put it up now?"

"You might as well. Do it while he's getting her under. It'll save time."

Philip himself went straight into the theatre. Everything was ready. The lights were on, the nurses scrubbed and gowned, the instruments laid out, the air warmed to a controlled temperature of seventy-five degrees. He stood for a moment inside the door. It was a scene which never failed to excite him—the gleaming steel, the fanatical cleanliness, the hidden faces, the sense of wonderful impersonality, of insulation from the filth and disorder of the outside world. In here it was neither night nor day, summer nor winter. All effort, all attention, was concentrated upon one end. There was no noise. Personal relations were cut to a minimum; there were no arguments, no clashes of personality. Convention decreed that a surgeon operating was the holder of privileges as real as those of a judge presiding over a court. As the bearer of the final responsibility over life and death, his word must stand and command obedience. His dictatorship was absolute. Any discussion, any disagreement must wait until afterwards, when the lights were out, the patient bandaged and returned to the ward, and

the theatre then was just another place, with the mops moving over the floor and the drums clattering in and out of the sterilisers. And the surgeon himself . . . just another man, worried, peevish, fussy, his dignity discarded with his gown.

"Good evening, Mr. Selwood."

"Good evening, Nurse."

Philip liked the theatre staff nurse. She was a plain, angular girl, with a robust physique and a cheerful disposition, ideally suited to her job. She had two particularly rare and valuable qualities: she could act coolly and sensibly in a crisis, and was completely impervious to abuse.

Philip scrubbed his hands, put on gloves and gown, and sat on a stool in one corner of the theatre, his hands clasped as if in prayer, his eyelids drooping with fatigue. After a few minutes Greenwood came in, scrubbed and gowned in his turn, and sat beside him.

"Did it go in all right?" asked Philip.

"Yes. No trouble at all."

"Is she nearly under?"

"Shouldn't be long." There was a hesitant, bothered note in Greenwood's voice. As if anxious to change the subject, he said: "You think it's a ruptured spleen?"

"Probably. Though one can't be sure. It could be a loop of gut torn across." Philip yawned behind his mask. "I had a tiresome interview with the husband."

"He was pickled, wasn't he?"

"About half and half, I should say. He talked a lot of bunkum." Suddenly the effort of carrying on a conversation was too much. He couldn't be bothered to tell the story to Greenwood. He looked peevishly at the clock.

"For God's sake—what's Mohl doing? He should be able to get her under quicker than this."

"Perhaps I delayed him with the blood." Once again

there was a suspicion of something not told, something held back. Greenwood was usually such a very frank, open young man. Philip wondered if perhaps the two of them had quarrelled in the anæsthetic room—it was likely enough, at this time of night. At all events, it was nothing to do with him.

Presently the door leading into the anæsthetic room swung open. Two porters wheeled the patient in, Mola following behind with his gas machine. Philip looked at his face—there was nothing visible but two deep, heavy eyes peeping above the mask.

“Hello, Doc.” He found himself, for no very clear reason, indulging in a certain false, jocular heartiness. “Sorry to drag you from your sleep.”

Mola acknowledged the greeting with a nod. He did not speak. It was unlike him—usually his politeness was almost embarrassing. Philip was confirmed in his guess that there had been some sort of squabble with Greenwood. Well, to hell with him if he was going to turn sulky. Everybody was tired and fed up, if it came to that.

The operation began. Philip found, as always on such occasions, that once he had made the first incision he became quite unconscious of fatigue. If the operation went on too long, tiredness would return and increase gradually in intensity until it required an effort of will to maintain concentration. But for the first hour it was pure pleasure. This present case was the ideal emergency. It was unusual, it was dramatic, it was not excessively difficult, and it was short. The diagnosis was correct. He secured the ruptured spleen and removed it. He carefully inspected the other organs for injury but found none. Towards the end of the operation, the woman’s pulse, which had been almost impalpable throughout, began to return. Philip felt pleased with himself. He had, he knew, operated well. Now that

it was over, he began to feel very tired again. After stitching the muscle layers, he handed the needle to Greenwood.

"Could you stitch up the skin for me?" he said.

"Of course."

"I'm going back to bed. There's nothing else except to keep the blood transfusion going. Are you worried about her, Mola?"

Mola shook his head.

"Good. Then I'll leave her with you. Good-night, everyone—and thanks very much."

He returned to bed with a sense of work well done. It was often like that in surgery. At times everything was weariness, frustration, anxiety, disappointment—it was hard to imagine why a man in his senses should ever take it up. But then—when the job went well—there was a special sort of reward which he could not imagine himself obtaining from any other way of life. At the very least, it was a conviction of having taken part in an event of significance, of having done one's best at a task worth doing, for a reason unconnected with personal advantage. On the whole, Philip was not dissatisfied with his life.

## *Chapter Three*

IN PHILIP'S DREAM, he was alone with a woman in a burning house. The woman lay on the bed, groaning, and, looking down at her, Philip saw that it was the patient he had just operated on. She could not move and soon, he recognised, without feeling very strongly about it, she would be burnt to death.

Not necessarily, however, since there was just a chance that the fire-engine might arrive in time. He could hear the bell, faintly at first, then growing gradually louder. As the

fire-engine came into view, Philip noticed that it was driven by Sir Arthur Benson-Gray, rather dwarfed in size by his helmet. He appeared to be in no great hurry. Behind him sat Greenwood and Mola, chatting amicably.

Up to this point, the dream was in no way alarming. Philip had no sensation of being in danger himself, and the possible fate of the woman aroused no emotion in him. Then he turned round to look at her again, and suddenly the dream became a nightmare. For now it was Pamela who lay in the bed, her face contorted with fear, watching helplessly as the flames licked up through the floor-boards. . . .

Philip rushed in panic to the window. The fire-engine had hardly advanced at all. It was waiting at some traffic lights. When Sir Arthur saw Philip, he smiled in recognition and, with childish pride, began to ring his bell again. Philip shouted and waved his arms, but Sir Arthur merely smiled again, pointed to the red light, and rang his bell. Philip turned hopelessly back into the room. It was too late, too late. He watched the flames and the smoke close up around Pamela's body, which lifted, curved, snapped like a dry log of wood in the heat. As he watched, moaning with despair, he heard through the open window the bell of the fire-engine still ringing, its volume growing louder and louder. . . .

Suddenly, he was awake. He sat up in bed, taking gulps of air, wiping the sweat from his face. The stillness was intense—it was like the silence after a scream. Had he cried out? He could not remember.

Then the bell started again. It was, of course, he realised now, his telephone. He lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Selwood?" It was a female voice which he did not immediately recognise.

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Staff nurse, theatre." As Philip's brain cleared, he detected a note of urgency in the voice. "Mr. Selwood, could you come to the theatre right away?"

"Why?"

"I can't tell you over the phone. But I promise you it's very important."

He asked querulously: "Won't Sister do?"

"I'm afraid not. Please, Mr. Selwood——"

She sounded quite unusually upset. She was not a girl who was easily rattled. "All right," he said soothingly, "keep your shirt on. I'll be over."

As he made his way to the theatre, the heels of his slippers flapping listlessly upon the stone floor, he wondered what on earth it was all about. It fitted into no pattern. What reason could there be for so much mystery? What could possibly have happened that would not bear mentioning over the phone? If the whole thing was a mare's nest . . .

One glance at the theatre nurse's face was enough to assure him that to her, at least, the matter was deadly serious. He had never seen her so agitated.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked. He found himself speaking, for no very clear reason, in a whisper.

She pointed towards the surgeon's room. Philip went inside. At first he could see nothing unusual. There were the discarded theatre clothes lying crumpled on the floor, a pair of torn gloves, a row of rubber boots against the wall. In the far corner was the door leading into the shower. The door was half-open, letting in a ray of light, and on the floor Philip could just see a dark, unidentifiable shadow. He pushed the door fully open and stepped into the shower. Mola was lying flat on his back on the floor, his head on the stone rim surrounding the shower bath. His eyes were closed, his face ghastly, his breathing so shallow as to be almost imperceptible. Yet his position gave a curious



impression of being chosen deliberately. It was not the awkward, contorted posture of a man who has fallen in a fit. It was more as if he had leaned against the wall and gradually subsided.

Philip was suddenly conscious of the nurse standing behind him. He said: "He seems to have collapsed. When did you find him?"

"Just before I rang you. I came in to tidy up the lockers." She looked down at the immobile figure. "What do you think has happened to him?"

"I couldn't say, offhand." He thought rapidly. There was something very odd about this. It was no ordinary faint. An inevitable suspicion crossed his mind. He searched for an excuse to send nurse away.

He said: "Have you got any stimulants handy?"

"There's some coramine in the anæsthetic room."

"Put some into a syringe, would you, and bring it to me."

When she had gone out, he knelt down and lifted Mola's eyelids. The pupils were normal—at least it was not morphine. He rolled up one trouser leg and tested for the knee-jerk, but without response. With all his strength he gripped the tendon behind the heel and squeezed it. Mola's facial muscles twitched slightly, as if with pain. There was still a fragment of consciousness left.

Philip hesitated for a moment. There remained one other thing that he must do. Overcoming his inhibitions, he lifted Mola up and went through his pockets. Very soon he found what he was searching for. It was a phial of a barbiturate used for intravenous injection, which had once contained enough to put a grown man to sleep in a matter of seconds. Now it was empty. Philip put it into the pocket of his dressing-gown.

The nurse returned with the coramine. Philip injected it slowly into a vein. A few seconds afterwards, Mola gave

one deep, sighing breath, and his eyelids flickered a little. Otherwise, there was no result.

"I didn't think it would do much good," said Philip. "He's too deep. We shall have to move him from here as best we can. I'll need some help for that. Could you get hold of Greenwood?"

While she was away at the telephone, he brought in a chair from the surgeon's room and sat beside Mola, watching for any change in his condition. There was nothing else he could do. He was too tired to work out the answer to any of the more complex speculations involved, such as Mola's motives for his act, or what complications were likely to ensue from it. His mind for the moment would work only in the simplest terms. It kept repeating to him that this was a bad business, a very bad business indeed. There was no telling where it might end. One thing was certain—the affair would have to be handled with the utmost discretion.

When nurse returned, he said to her: "I don't know exactly what's happened here, but you were quite right to inform me first."

"Thank you, Mr. Selwood." She added, in a conspiratorial fashion: "I didn't want to go straight to Night Sister. I thought he must be drunk or something."

"No—he's not drunk. But, all the same, it would be better if everybody didn't know about it. I'd be glad if you could keep it to yourself for the moment."

"Of course."

Philip regarded her, wondering how much reliance he could place on her word. He knew how much he was asking. Life in the Nurses' Home was a barren, monotonous affair, and gossip about the doctors was one of the few features which enlivened it. Such a titbit of scandal as this occurred only once in ten years or so. To refrain from mentioning it would be an act of self-denial of heroic pro-

portions. On the other hand, she was a remarkably good girl, one of the best. She should be able to hold it for almost a week; one could hardly expect more.

She seemed to guess his thought. "It's all right," she said. "You can trust me." She looked at her watch. "But if you don't mind—I've some cleaning up to do. . . ."

"Certainly. Don't let me keep you. Greenwood and I can manage."

"If you want me again, just let me know."

"I will. And, Nurse——" He said sincerely: "Thank you very much. You've been very good. I want you to know I appreciate it."

She smiled and went back into the theatre. From the distance, Philip could hear her polishing the instruments and putting them away in the cupboards. Presently Greenwood arrived.

As he saw Philip he said: "Nurse rang and said you wanted me. I couldn't quite grasp what——" Suddenly he saw Mola on the floor. "Good God! What's happened?"

"This is how nurse found him," said Philip. He took the ampoule out of his pocket and showed it to Greenwood.

Greenwood looked puzzled.

"I found it on him."

"You think he took it?" Greenwood asked.

"Yes."

"But it might have been some he was using in the ordinary way. He might have put it in his pocket by mistake——"

Philip shook his head. "He took it all right."

"But how? Do you mean to say he injected it into his own vein?"

"I don't know. I haven't been able to ask him yet. As you see, he's flat out."

In a hushed voice, Greenwood said: "Do you suppose he tried to kill himself?"

"I suppose it's a possibility," said Philip, "but, all things considered, I doubt it."

"I'm not so sure," said Greenwood. His pink, babyish face wore an unhappy, solemn expression, almost as if he felt that he was in some way to blame. "He was pretty depressed."

"He wasn't depressed enough to take a lethal dose," said Philip. "There's only a gram in that bottle. That wouldn't kill a grown man. Especially," he added significantly, "if he was used to it. But that's neither here nor there. The thing to do now is to get him to his own room before the whole hospital gets to know about it."

Greenwood looked down at the inert figure and said: "We shall need a trolley."

"Or carry him."

"A hell of a job."

"Yes," agreed Philip, "I think you're right. A trolley's more conspicuous, but so much quicker. . . ."

The trolleys were kept next door, in the porter's room. They wheeled one into the surgeon's room and lifted Mola on to it, covering him with a blanket. He was not very heavy.

Mola's room was away from those of the other residents. It was inconveniently placed at the far end of the long corridor and was usually occupied by the most recent arrival. There was the whole length of the corridor to traverse. Philip peeped out of the theatre door. The corridor was dark and deserted.

"All clear," he whispered.

"Shall we go at walking pace or run it?"

"A quick walk. And as quiet as you can."

The corridor remained deserted. Their journey to Mola's room was neither interrupted nor, so far as Philip could see, observed. They lifted Mola on to the bed. Philip put the blanket back on to the trolley.

"Can you wheel that back to the theatre?" he said to Greenwood. "If anybody stops you, pretend it was some sort of a joke."

"O.K."

Philip was left with Mola, who was now beginning to breathe more deeply and noisily. He looked dreadful, in his crumpled blue suit, covered with dust from the theatre floor. He would have to be undressed. With a sense of grievance, Philip stripped the flaccid body and clothed it in pyjamas. This, he felt, was hardly his job. He was beginning to wish that he had taken Mola to a ward and risked the publicity.

Finally Mola lay between the sheets. But he appeared far from comfortable there. He began to heave, as if on the point of vomiting. Philip looked around desperately for something which could be used as a receiver, but there was nothing. He went outside into the bathroom. Behind the door was an enamel bowl full of scrubbing brushes. He emptied the brushes out and brought back the bowl just in time for Mola to be sick into it. He sat there, beside the bed, holding Mola's head with one hand and the bowl in the other. He was very tired of the whole squalid situation.

When Greenwood came back, Philip handed him the bowl. "For God's sake, empty this somewhere." As Greenwood washed it out, Philip asked: "Did anyone see you?"

"Not a soul."

"Well, that's something."

Greenwood returned and sat on the bed.

"What do we do now?" he asked.

"We can't really leave him just yet," said Philip reluctantly. "His tongue could fall back and choke him." He added with annoyance: "If only we had a nurse here, we could go to bed."

"I'll stay if you like."

"No. It's all right. You go to bed."

"I wouldn't mind," said Greenwood, "really I wouldn't. You see," he explained, with rather touching gravity, "I feel in a way responsible."

"Responsible!" Philip looked at him in astonishment. "What on earth——?"

"I should have waited for him," said Greenwood, as if talking to himself. His brow was furrowed with concern. "I'd noticed something odd about him earlier on, in the anæsthetic room."

"Odd?"

"Yes, he was queer. I didn't say anything to you about it, because I thought it wasn't really my business, and I don't like to do a man down . . . especially a chap like Mola." He looked at Philip and said earnestly: "He's had a pretty rotten time, you know, one way and another——"

"Yes," said Philip impatiently, "I know, I know. But get back to the point. In what way was he queer?"

"Well, he was starting off like he usually does, injecting into an arm vein. He said to me that he was a bit rushed, and would I mind putting the needle into the vein for him. So I did. By that time he'd filled the syringe. All he had to do was to fit the needle on to the syringe and squirt the stuff in." He paused, as if visualising the incident. "It was most extraordinary. He couldn't do it."

"Why not?"

"He couldn't get the two together. He kept bringing down the syringe towards the needle and missing it by almost half an inch. His co-ordination was all to hell. After about the fourth time, I couldn't stand it any longer. I took the syringe out of his hand and did it for him."

"I see," said Philip slowly. He remembered Greenwood's manner when he had come into the theatre. So that was what had upset him . . .

Greenwood went on: "As you can imagine, I was a bit nervy about the anæsthetic after that, but it all seemed to go off all right. I thought I wouldn't mention it, but just keep an eye on the patient. If I saw Mola making a mess of the anæsthetic, I was going to step in and tell you. But he seemed to pull himself together. Towards the end I'd stopped worrying. After you left, I sewed up and put on the bandages. The patient was fine. Then I left too. Mola was still pottering about in the theatre. I suppose it was then that he took the stuff."

"It looks to me," said Philip, "as if he was taking it all evening. Then he took a spot too much and knocked himself out."

"All evening?" Greenwood looked puzzled.

"Yes." Philip hesitated. But Greenwood would have to know; it was better to tell him now. "He was an addict. He told me he was cured, but——" He looked down at the bed. "Well, there we are."

"Oh," said Greenwood. He spoke in a low voice, glancing at Mola as if afraid he might overhear. "I didn't know that."

"So you see, there's no need for you to feel responsible. He'd started long before you went to bed."

Greenwood shook his head. "It wasn't just that. There's something else. I don't know whether I ought to tell you, but under the circumstances . . . Yesterday evening he got hold of me and told me a very odd sort of story—about some woman he'd got into difficulties with. And then——" Greenwood hesitated.

"He asked you to lend him fifty pounds?" suggested Philip.

Greenwood looked at him open-mouthed. "You knew?"

"He tried me first. What did you say?"

"Well, of course, I couldn't, because I hadn't got it. As

I explained to him, on my salary . . . He said he quite understood; he'd only tried me because he was desperate. Then he said that the only thing now was to try somebody who *had* some money."

"Who did he mean by that? Anybody in particular?"

"Yes. He was talking of McBain."

"McBain!"

"Yes," agreed Greenwood. "I thought it sounded rather cheek myself. But Mola said McBain was a decent sort of chap and would probably help him."

Philip's heart sank within him. He looked at Mola with compassion. "The poor silly idiot. McBain's as mean as dirt, and hates him into the bargain. I suppose he must have asked him today?"

"I should imagine so."

There was a silence. The two men sat on either side of the bed, each preoccupied with his own thoughts. Between them, a living question mark, a problem in human obligations, lay the unconscious Mola. Finally Philip said: "Supposing you'd had the fifty pounds, would you have lent it to him?"

Greenwood realised the importance of the question. He thought for a moment before replying. "It's hard to say. If that was all I had, perhaps not. But if I was reasonably well-off—you know, thousands—yes, I honestly think I would have done. It seemed to mean so much to him."

Philip nodded gloomily. There was no help here. He was oppressed by the thought of Mola's interview with McBain. No humiliation would have been spared. But behind his pity for Mola was a background of irritation. The man had a positive genius for doing the wrong thing. He was a born victim.

His resentment transferred itself momentarily to Greenwood.



"It's all very well to talk like that," he said coldly. "If you'd had the money, you might have thought differently."

Greenwood looked surprised and rather hurt. But he answered with his usual quiet courtesy. "Perhaps you're right."

Philip's irritation gave place to shame. He had spoken to Greenwood like a schoolmaster. He smiled apologetically. "Have a cigarette?"

They sat for a while in silence. Then Philip said: "Of course, we can't sit on this for very long. The consultants will have to know."

Greenwood nodded.

"But as few other people as possible. I'll tell B.G. in the morning. It would be better if you said nothing to anyone for the present.

"Right-ho."

The conversation died. They were both too tired to talk for long. They waited for some sign of movement from Mola. After about half an hour he began to stir; he moved his head, and muttered a few unintelligible words. He was beginning to come round.

Philip spoke to him. Mola opened his eyes for a split second and then closed them again. He made no answer to questions. It was almost as if he was deliberately refusing to respond. Philip began to wonder if he was more conscious than he appeared.

After a few abortive attempts to communicate, he said to Greenwood: "It's no use trying to talk to him. We shan't get any sense."

Greenwood shook his head. He lifted one of Mola's arms and dropped it again. "He should be safe now, shouldn't he?"

"I should think so." Philip got up from his chair. "We can't stay here all night. If he chokes now, it's his own fault. Let's go to bed."

They arranged Mola as comfortably as possible, put the bowl within close reach of his bed, and left him. As Philip walked back along the corridor towards his own room, the daylight was just beginning to appear. It was nearly six o'clock, and soon the hospital would be awake. There was something very chill and depressing about going to bed at this time. He would be lucky, he reflected, if he got any more than two hours sleep.

Back in his room, he took off his dressing-gown and sat on the edge of the bed. The sheets were cold, and the effort of getting into them almost too great. He stretched out his hand to turn out the bedside light.

The telephone rang.

"Christ!" he said. "Christ!" Self-pity welled up within him.

He lifted the receiver. "Who is it?"

"Night Sister," said the operator.

There was a click as he put the call through. Then Night Sister's voice, shrill with panic.

"Mr. Selwood, is that you?"

"Yes."

"Where have you been? I've been trying to get you for over an hour. And I couldn't find Mr. Greenwood either! I tried everywhere!"

It came to Philip as a sickening realisation that when he had gone to Mola's room he had broken a stringent rule of the hospital. He had not notified his whereabouts. "Yes, I'm sorry about that," he said unhappily. "I'll explain later. What's the trouble? What did you want me for?"

"It was your operation case of this evening. She suddenly began to go down."

"Did she?" He was not too concerned. Night Sister was notorious for getting excited over trifles. "She was all right when she left the theatre."

"Yes," said the plaintive voice. "I couldn't understand it. That's why I tried to get you——"

"All right—all right!" This reiteration was maddening. "But what about the patient? How is she now?"

There was a slight pause. Then Sister said: "She's dead. She died half an hour ago. She never came round from the anæsthetic."

## *Chapter Four*

IT WAS ONE OF THE TRADITIONAL FORMALITIES at the Royal that, when a consultant made a routine visit to the hospital, he should be received at the front door by the members of his team. Each morning at ten o'clock the registrars and house surgeons were to be seen arrayed around the massive fireplace just beside the porter's lodge, in clean white coats, waiting for their chiefs. One by one, the consultants drove up, parked their cars in the drive, left their black Homburg hats in the staff room, and were then escorted by their respective subordinates to the wards. The registrar walked to one side of the consultant, the house-man to the other. Behind followed a collection of students, varying in numbers according to the consultant's popularity as a teacher. Over such little demonstrations of pomp and protocol the bust of Roderick presided benignly.

On this particular morning Philip waited for Sir Arthur alone. He had told Greenwood and the students not to attend. He was not looking forward to the interview which awaited him.

When Sir Arthur arrived, he raised his eyebrows and looked around in surprise. As a great upholder of tradition, he liked to be received by a full muster of his team.

"I hope you don't mind," said Philip apologetically, "but

I called off your teaching round for this morning. I have something rather important to tell you."

Benson-Gray looked at him sharply. He had a nose for trouble. But he merely asked his usual, semi-jocular question: "What's the bad news?"

"I'm afraid it really is bad news," said Philip.

"Oh." Sir Arthur made a grimace. "Then I might as well listen to it in reasonable comfort. Come in here."

He led Philip into the staff room, showed him to one of the high-backed leather arm-chairs, and offered his cigarette-case. He sat down himself.

"Well, my boy, out with it," he said amiably. Before Philip could comply, he went on: "When I worked with Roderick, he always used to say that: 'Out with it, whatever it is'. We've all done these things, you know. The more surgery a man does, the more mistakes he makes. Whatever you've done, I've probably done it before you, and better men than I am." He shook his head sadly. "Sometimes I can hardly sleep at night, remembering the things I've done."

"I'm afraid," said Philip, "that this is rather different."

"It always is, my boy." Sir Arthur was playing the elder statesman in his most accomplished manner; but there was apprehension in his eyes. "But I mustn't interrupt. You want to tell me about it."

"There are two matters really." Philip hesitated, arranging his thoughts. He had spent the last hour working out the most suitable way of telling his story. "In the first place, I had a death last night."

Benson-Gray nodded. This was obviously the sort of thing he had expected. He motioned to Philip to proceed.

Philip told him the story of the motor accident and the woman he had operated on during the night, up to the time when he retired to bed for the first time. He did not

mention Mola. At this point Sir Arthur said: "It sounds all very satisfactory so far. What happened then?"

"It seems," said Philip slowly, "that she went rapidly downhill, for some unexplained reason, several hours later, and died."

"What do you mean—'it seems'?" asked Sir Arthur sharply. "Didn't you see her?"

"No. That's just the trouble. That's what I feel so badly about. They couldn't find me."

"Couldn't find you? But why not?"

"Well, that's the second thing . . ." As briefly as possible, he told the story of Mola's collapse during the night. At the end Sir Arthur said: "I suppose there's no real doubt about him taking the drug?"

"Of course," said Philip feebly, "it's only circumstantial evidence. . . ."

"Oh, quite—quite. But good enough."

"I certainly thought you should know. I've nothing against the fellow personally, but I honestly don't think he ought to give any more anæsthetics for the present. It wouldn't be fair on the patients."

"Oh, certainly not!" agreed Sir Arthur. "No question of it." He drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair, and said reflectively: "A drug addict! You know, I always thought there was something wrong with him, even at the appointment committee. I was against him then. It was Isherwood who got him in." He turned his mind back to the present. "Where is he now?"

"Sleeping it off. Fortunately he hasn't got a list this morning."

"Good. That gives us an hour or two to sort things out. Then there's this question of your not seeing the patient. . . . You were in Mola's room all the time?"

"Yes."

Sir Arthur shook his head gloomily. He did not like the sound of the affair at all. "It'll have to go to the coroner."

"I'm afraid so," said Philip. Now was the time, he thought, to show that he was at least prepared to be honest and open about his mistake. "I'm sorry about this, sir. It was completely my fault. I was so taken aback that I never thought of telling them where I was."

"It should be automatic—a reflex—you know that. It's part of your training."

"I know," said Philip miserably. "I'm really dreadfully sorry."

Sir Arthur's severity relaxed a little. "Still, the circumstances are unusual—I won't deny that. With luck, we might be able to pull you through the inquest, if we play our cards properly. We'd better have a talk to Froy. He's very astute at handling matters like this."

They walked towards the administrative block in silence. Just before they reached Froy's office, Sir Arthur stopped. He seemed to feel it necessary for him to say something else.

"Before we talk to anyone else about this, Philip, I want to tell you something. For your sake I may try to play this down, so as to get you let down as lightly as possible. But, between ourselves, you made a very grave mistake. It was worse than a mistake—it was carelessness. She probably would have died anyway, but that's not the point. It *could* have meant a life.

"I want you to realise here and now—this is the sort of thing that you can perhaps get away with once in surgery, that's all. If anything similar happens again, you're done for." He paused for a moment to allow his words to sink in. Then, as if to take away some of the sting, he patted Philip paternally on the shoulder and said: "That's something I don't want to happen."

Froy unclasped his little hairy fingers and made a final note on the piece of paper which lay on his desk. "So that's the lot?"

"Yes," said Philip.

Froy drew a line at the bottom of the sheet and then began to re-read what he had written. His face was impassive. As Philip and Sir Arthur had talked, he had listened in silence, his tiny figure lost in the chair, his eyes half-closed. Occasionally he had nodded his head to show comprehension. Now he went through his notes like a man adding up figures in a ledger.

"It's enough," he said finally. He took a deep, wheezy breath and went on: "Now this chap Mola. I don't know much about him. Medical staffing isn't my business. But he sounds like a real bad hat to me. I should say we ought to be rid of him."

"Decidedly," said Sir Arthur. "The mystery to me is that the committee ever appointed him in the first place."

Froy nodded. "I remember you opposed it."

"Certainly I did," said Sir Arthur righteously. "A most regrettable appointment—quite indefensible, in fact. There wasn't a single person there who thought he was the best man for the job."

Froy nodded again. To Philip he was a grotesque yet rather frightening figure. His apparent lack of imagination, of normal human sympathy, was unnerving. He had, Philip was sure, no real understanding of the events of the previous night. One could never explain to him the fatigue, the atmosphere of impending panic, the feeling of isolation. . . . He was like some self-important staff officer, far from the smell of powder, waiting to deliver judgment on a commando raid. It seemed outrageous that he should have anything to do with the matter at all.

The bitterness which rose in him against Froy was no

surprise to Philip. He had never liked the man. What disturbed him more was the impression of some sort of special understanding between Froy and Sir Arthur, which, when one considered the traditional hostility of medical men towards administrators, took on almost the character of a conspiracy. Philip had been trained to regard the medical profession as a closely-knit and self-sufficient unit. In the management of hospitals it was unfortunately necessary to employ laymen for certain special tasks, but they could never be looked upon as comparable in importance to doctors; nor was it advisable to be too free in one's association with them. The profession, within its particular field, was a law unto itself, with its own standards of judgment. It claimed the right to honour, to censure, to excommunicate.

These claims had always seemed perfectly reasonable to Philip. They were the privilege of any great and responsible organisation. If one wished to run with the pack, it was necessary to obey the law of the pack; and, in return, the pack was obliged to defend any one of its members from external assaults. Internal discipline was quite another matter.

Sir Arthur's sensitivity to atmosphere was always acute. He noticed the reproach on Philip's face and guessed its meaning immediately.

"However," he said, "it may be that we're going a little too far before hearing the other side of the case. We shall have to find out what Mola himself says about it. There's no question of him giving any more anæsthetics, of course—or anyway not for the moment. We shall have to tell him that. But unofficially, I think."

He emphasised the last sentence. His manner towards Froy had perceptibly changed. He was no longer asking advice—he was notifying the other of a course of action he intended to take. The inference was that medical matters



were a concern of the medical staff alone. The pack would deal with its own.

Froy's reaction to this sort of snub was not easy to assess. He did not give the impression of being a sensitive man. He acquiesced without obvious discomfiture.

"It would hardly be desirable," he agreed, "to have anything in writing."

"Exactly," said Sir Arthur. "We don't want to make accusations it would be difficult to sustain, no matter how true they might be. In any case, he won't want a scandal. The best thing would be for him to resign. I'll get McBain to go and have a heart-to-heart talk to him."

"No!" said Philip involuntarily. "Not McBain!"

Sir Arthur raised his eyebrows. This time, he conveyed very clearly, it was Philip who had perpetrated an indiscretion, and a serious one at that. It was quite outside his province to criticise members of the consultant staff.

"*Doctor* McBain . . ." Sir Arthur said in his soft but curiously emphatic voice. The slight accentuation of the word 'Doctor' was a reminder that Philip had stepped out of his place. "Doctor McBain, as senior anæsthetist, is obviously the correct person to deal with this matter. Have you any reason for objecting to him?"

"It was only," said Philip awkwardly, "that I don't think he and Mola get on very well together. You see . . ." his voice trailed away. He had been led into a hopeless position. He could not tell them the real truth without bringing out the story of Mola's efforts to borrow money. In any case, they must know already that McBain hated Mola, though they would under no circumstances admit it. McBain was the senior anæsthetist. There was no more to be said.

"I am confident," said Sir Arthur primly, "that we can disregard any possibility of personal bias on the part of

Doctor McBain. There is no doubt, in my opinion, that he is the best person to handle the matter."

"I agree," said Froy. He drew another line across his sheet of paper. "So that disposes of that for the moment. Now we're left with this business of the woman who died in the night."

Philip drew a deep breath. It was his turn now.

Froy pencilled in a small note and then continued: "The first obvious fact is that, since she didn't come round, there must be a inquest, which Mr. Selwood here will have to attend."

He paused again, and looked complacently at Philip. It was plain that he was taking a good deal of pleasure in all this. To give Froy his due, it was not purely from the contemplation of the misfortunes of others. It pleased him to be able to exercise his gift for planning and intrigue, to project a cold, analytical approach on to delicate problems. "To get down to cases, what are we really worried about here?"

"The fact," said Sir Arthur, "that she wasn't seen by a doctor between the operation and the time of death. We don't want that made public."

Froy absent-mindedly scratched his head with the end of his pencil. "Is there any reason why it should be? The coroner doesn't usually ask about that unless he has any reason to be suspicious. On the other hand, if somebody brings it up . . ." He said to Philip: "Were there any relatives about?"

Philip nodded unhappily. "Yes. The husband."

"Was he there all the time?"

"So far as I know. I saw him before operating and I saw him again after she died."

"What was he like?"

"Rather a shifty type, I should say. He seemed mainly concerned with the question of blame for the accident."

"How did he seem when you saw him for the second time?"

Philip tried to recall the man to mind. Already the events of the night were beginning to seem a little hazy and unreal. "He was sober then. But still very excitable. He kept saying she was the best wife in the world and he'd rather have cut off his right hand than that this should have happened."

Sir Arthur made a grimace. "In my experience," he said, "expressions of that sort are almost invariably a prelude to litigation."

Froy nodded agreement. Then he said to Philip: "You say the police were there?"

"Yes."

"Did you talk to them?"

"No. I was too busy."

"A pity," said Froy judicially. "It's always an advantage to play in with the police. And they like to be taken notice of."

There was a critical note in his voice. It seemed to Philip that now was the time to make one point clear. He was prepared to submit his conduct for judgment to his professional superiors and the Board of Governors. But not, under any circumstances, to Froy.

"If I worked office hours," he said tartly, "I might have time for such refinements. As it is, I do the best I can."

"Oh, quite—quite." Froy was unperturbed. He had been listening to taunts of this sort for years. They gave him a sort of pleasure. The resentment which prompted them was an acknowledgment of his power. "All the same, it would be useful to know what they are thinking of doing in connection with the accident."

"Would that affect the inquest?" asked Philip.

"Yes—it might." Froy did not say how. "In fact, I think it would be worth while holding discussion over until we

know what their plans are. If you agree, Sir Arthur, I could make a few discreet inquiries. . . ."

Sir Arthur nodded. Froy made another note on his pad and tossed the pencil down on the desk. "And then we could talk about the matter again."

## *Chapter Five*

THE INTERVIEW WITH FROY had taken up most of Philip's morning, and he had little time to spare for the rest of the day. It was late afternoon before he could get up to see Mola.

The little Spaniard was still in bed. Unshaven, in crumpled pyjamas, he looked, if anything, worse than he had done the night before. His hands and lips trembled, his fingers were yellow with nicotine. Butts of countless cigarettes, some of them only half-smoked, lay on the tray by his bedside, which also carried a congealed and neglected lunch. The air of the room was stagnant and unhealthy.

Philip had prepared his approach. The great thing was not to look shocked, to treat it as an ordinary illness.

"Hello," he said, perhaps rather too cheerfully. "How goes it? Feeling better?"

Mola made a faint effort to respond to this heartiness, but without result. The smile which he endeavoured to form at the corners of his mouth was stillborn, as if he had lost control of his facial muscles. "I am—as you see," he said.

"You *look* much better than last night," said Philip with determination. "Though I must say they don't seem to be looking after you very well. Do you mind if I open this window?"

"Please do so."

After opening the window, Philip sat down in the single

arm-chair which the room contained. This was not going to be an easy conversation. He decided to persist with his initial approach. "Have you got everything you want? Books—and so on?"

"Yes. Except perhaps—some cigarettes—if it could be arranged . . .?"

"Of course," said Philip enthusiastically. It was good to be able to say something positive. "I'll fix that as soon as I go downstairs. Nothing else?"

"No. Nothing else."

Conversation languished again. Philip searched for some not too abrupt way of introducing the topic which, some way or other, would have to be discussed. There was something in Mola's manner which made it particularly difficult. For one normally so effusive, it was cold, almost hostile. He had made no attempt to express gratitude for what had been done for him the previous night.

Eventually Mola himself broke the silence.

"You are no doubt anxious," he said, "to hear the result of my conversation with Doctor McBain."

There was now no doubt of the aggression in his attitude. Philip had never known him like this before. On past occasions his moments of bitterness had always been tempered by resignation. Was this the after-effects of the drug?

"He came to see you?"

"Naturally." Mola turned his head and gazed stonily out of the window. Like most nervous people, when in moments of great emotional stress he could not bear to look straight at another person. "I presumed it was at your request that he did so."

"I haven't set eyes on him all day," protested Philip.

"But you knew he had been—that was clear to me. If you did not speak to him, perhaps you will tell me who did?"

"Benson-Gray, I expect." Philip added defensively: "I

couldn't avoid telling *him*. He had to know why you weren't on duty."

"What was it that you said to him?"

Philip hesitated. He did not know where he stood with this new, suspicious Mola. Was it possible that Mola thought he did not know the cause of last night's débâcle? Or was he dealing with one of those things that simply could not be talked about? You could be casual about most vices. It was possible to joke about drunkenness and fornication. But not about this. If anyone mentioned the words 'drugs' or 'addiction', it must be Mola himself.

"I told him you'd collapsed last night, and weren't fit for work."

Mola brooded for a moment. Then he said:

"McBain said he thought it better that I should not work for the moment." At the memory of McBain he began to tremble. Emotion, as always, had an adverse effect on his English. "I ask him why, and he says—if you are liable to these attacks, it may be dangerous. I tell him I feel fine. But he will not listen to me."

"Well really," said Philip reasonably, "you can hardly blame him. Naturally he wants to make sure you're quite fit. . . ."

Mola shook his head. "Let us not tell lies. That is not so—you know it is not. I am to be—what is the word?—'suspended'. That is to say, I must give no more anæsthetics until further notice. It is also suggested that I mig<sup>1</sup> care to resign on the grounds of health. Nothing definite is to be said. It is all to be very discreet and convenient. Isn't that so?"

"It sounds like it," admitted Philip.

"Very British," said Mola, with a shade of contempt. "No doubt an Englishman, in my place, would do what was suggested to him?"

"Probably."

Mola leaned forward in a spasm of excitement. "But I shall not!" he cried. "You can tell your friend Sir Benson-Gray—much as I regret that it will cause him embarrassment——"

"I think," said Philip, "that you're over-dramatising this. There's no conspiracy against you, as you seem to imagine." He was becoming testy himself, partly because of Mola's difficult attitude, and partly because of a confusion in his mind as to where his own allegiance lay. When he was with Froy, or Benson-Gray, or McBain, he had no doubt that his sympathies were with Mola. After talking to Mola for half an hour, he was not so sure. "Why should Sir Arthur be embarrassed by your refusal to resign?"

Mola nodded, with the air of a man who has been expecting this very question.

"I will tell you." He lit one cigarette from the stub of another. "I am informed by Doctor McBain that there was a death last night."

"Yes. That's so. It was the woman we did together."

"Would you call it—an anæsthetic death?"

"No. She was all right when she left the table."

"Then why is there an inquest? McBain said there must be an inquest."

"It's just a ruling. She didn't come round afterwards. When that happens, they have to be reported to the coroner."

"I cannot understand her dying like that. There was no difficulty . . ."

"It's not your worry so much as mine. They called me later on and couldn't find me."

Mola looked puzzled. "Where were you?"

"Here."

"Oh. Oh—I see." Mola's aggressiveness was a fragile plant. It wilted noticeably in the face of this disclosure.

"But don't worry. Benson-Gray thinks that can probably be got over."

"Got over?" Mola repeated the words deliberately, as if not clear as to their meaning.

"Yes. Handled in some way so that the details needn't come out."

Mola frowned. "But how can that be? An inquest is an open court. Questions are asked—they must be answered."

"Oh, I don't know how," said Philip impatiently. He was not too happy himself about this side of it. "It may be a little difficult. But Benson-Gray and Froy are pretty experienced. They'll tell me what line to take."

Suspicion, momentarily banished, returned to Mola's voice in greater force than ever. "And you do not know what line that will be?" he asked sardonically.

"No. Not yet."

"Then I will tell you." His voice rose in his excitement. "A mistake has been made. Everybody knows it. Somebody must be blamed. Not you, of course. You are rich, you are English, you are the protégé of an influential person. Who then?" He prodded his chest. "There is one here who is neither rich nor influential, a foreigner whom no one knows or cares about, who would never have been here at all if it had not been for a disagreement at the appointments committee——"

"Who told you that?"

"McBain. He grew angry when I would not agree to do as he said."

"It was a filthy thing to say!"

Mola lay back on the pillows. The effort of his previous outburst appeared to have exhausted him. "He has little tact," he said.

There was a silence. Philip felt that he should be indignant at Mola's suspicions, his allegations of trickery and bad faith.



He had every right to be. But always it was the same; at the moment of having aroused anger or impatience, Mola would suddenly, whether by accident or design, give a glimpse of such an appalling vulnerability that it seemed shameful to attack him.

Philip said: "I know what you feel about McBain. I don't like him either. But you're getting things out of proportion. Nobody's trying to do you down because you're a foreigner. That death was my responsibility and I shall take it. Nobody can alter that."

"Perhaps," said Mola, unconvinced. "Perhaps not. But they will try."

## *Chapter Six*

AFTER DINNER THAT NIGHT, Pamela rang up.

"Hello, darling, is that you?"

"Yes."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, of course I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Father's been telling me about this awful business last night. I——"

"Just a minute," he cut in, as gently as possible. "Sorry to interrupt but—you know how it is with the telephones in this place. Anybody could be listening. Would you like to drive down here and see me?"

"Yes, I understand. I'll be along in ten minutes."

He watched from the window as she drove up and parked her car outside the front door. It was typical that she should use the space reserved for members of the staff and the Board of Governors. She was, he thought, a natural aristocrat, accustomed to assuming privileges as of right. He loved to watch her secretly, like this, from a distance, magnificent in

her beauty and her self-possession; to play a game with himself in which he pretended that he did not know her at all, that she was just an infinitely desirable creature admired from afar, with no chance of ever making her acquaintance. So that when she did come to him, and allowed him to take her in his arms and make love to her, it was an exquisite, almost unbelievable surprise, the realisation of a dream. At times the intense pleasure he derived from this fantasy disturbed him. It seemed unhealthily romantic for a man contemplating the practical and down-to-earth step of marriage. There was altogether too much in favour of Pamela. If she had been poor, or unintelligent, or plain in appearance, he could be more sure of his own motives. Could he be sure that his love was completely divorced from ambition, from violent sexual attraction, from pride in the possession of a valuable luxury article?

When she came into his room and kissed him, any such doubts were banished, condemned as the product of a timid disinclination to believe in his own luck.

When they sat down together on the sofa, she said: "Poor darling, I suppose you feel perfectly dreadful."

"It's not very pleasant. Your father told you everything?"

"Yes."

"He gave me a pretty sharp ticking-off this morning."

"Yes, I know. He must have hated it almost as much as you did. He's terribly fond of you, you know. He showed it more tonight than he's ever done."

"He must have been disappointed in me."

"He thinks you made a mistake. But then, as he says, everybody does sometimes. You can't deny he's very understanding about that sort of thing."

"Oh yes," admitted Philip. "That's one of the things that everybody respects him for. He never makes out that he's infallible."

"Of course, it's all very upsetting for him. It's not only you—there's the reputation of the hospital to think of. If this story once got out . . . I haven't seen him so excited in years. You know how controlled he is normally. He kept saying 'Drug addicts! At the Royal! Roderick would have turned in his grave!'"

"He surely doesn't hold me responsible for that."

"No—certainly not. He's going to go for the appointments committee about it, particularly Isherwood. And really, as I told him, none of it was your fault. If it hadn't been for that abominable little Mola, none of this would have happened."

Philip shook his head. "That doesn't exonerate me. I went to Mola as I would have gone to any ill person. He can't be blamed for the death."

"But why should you be? You didn't make him take this stuff—whatever it is——"

"No—not directly . . ."

"What do you mean—not directly?"

"If I'd lent him that money . . ."

"Oh, don't be absurd!" she exploded indignantly. "As if you had any obligation!"

"It has to be said," persisted Philip. "He needed the money desperately. I could have lent it to him without really missing it, but I didn't. So he went to McBain. I don't know what McBain said to him, but following that he took the stuff. Always," he qualified, "assuming that he did take it, because, though I'm certain in my own mind, I haven't any real proof. Now," he went on, trying to feel his way through the conflicting points of view which beset him, "you can reasonably say that I had no obligation. Nor had McBain. Nor had the appointments committee or that woman he picked up in London. Yet are you satisfied with the way they've behaved? The fact is that ever since he

came over to England, Mola's been nobody's business. He started at a disadvantage, and each time he tried to get out of one difficulty it led him into another. All it needed was for somebody, some time, to do a generous action that he wasn't obliged to do. But nobody did."

"You think that?" said Pamela sceptically. "You think one leg-up would have been sufficient to put him right?"

"I think so—yes."

"Well, I don't." Her voice became softer. "Look, Philip, you know me, or you should, anyway. I don't think I'm a particularly callous person. Mola's had a difficult life, I'll agree, and for that I'm sorry. But so have a lot of other people. You've got to recognise that he's a naturally lame duck. Whatever you did for him, he'd end up in trouble. It's like people who are always late for appointments. Each time they have a wonderful excuse that explains everything. But after a while you begin to wonder why it always happens to the same people. I don't like this conception of one piece of bad luck setting up a whole chain of circumstances which can't be evaded—it's too easy altogether. A man of any character would have found some way out."

"All right," admitted Philip, "he's weak. But can he help that?"

"Can you?"

Philip laughed ruefully. "Am I my brother's keeper? It's all too difficult. And I'm tired of the subject anyway." He lay back on the sofa and pulled her gently towards him. She went to him willingly, almost gratefully. "Let's not talk so much."

Some time later he said: "You realise this sort of thing is strictly forbidden in the residents' quarters?"

"Poor Uncle Roddy," she said sleepily, "he must be having a restless time these days."

## Chapter Seven

EVERY CONSCIENTIOUS ARTIST, while striving to do as well as he can over the whole of his chosen field, will have some special branch for which he feels himself peculiarly gifted. He may have a knack for counterpoint, for painting animals in motion, for concealing a fast ball that goes away with the arm. Taken by itself, such a talent does no more than arouse interest. But, when superimposed on a high general standard of performance, it can suggest a touch of genius.

During a long career of administration Froy had made himself master of most of the devices of bureaucracy. He could be evasive, he could temporise, he could toady, he could observe the letter rather than the spirit of the law as well as any man. But in the writing of obscurely offensive letters he showed a natural brilliance which was all his own.

Almost every morning, Philip would receive internal memoranda of some sort from the secretary. These fell into a series of groups. There were requests to do the impossible, such as taking action to prevent overcrowding in the lifts. There were demands for statistics which involved a vast amount of probably quite valueless work. There were attempts to saddle Philip, by inference, with responsibility for matters over which he could exert no effective control—‘I am requested to ask you to take *all possible steps* to ensure that the correct blood is given in transfusions, since the neglect of this precaution may lead to serious accidents. . . .’ Finally, there were certain coldly official, arrogant little notes which derived their main effect from the fact that Froy allowed his secretary to sign them for him.

It was one of these which Philip received two days after he and Sir Arthur had spoken to Froy in his office. It read:

Memo: To Resident Surgical Registrar. Urgent.

The above resident officer is requested to attend at the Secretary's office between 9.30 a.m. and 10 a.m. this morning.

(Signed) H. Chalk (Miss)

This curt summons had the usual effect. Philip deliberately delayed presenting himself until half-past eleven.

Froy was sitting at his desk reading a Ministry report. He waved Philip to a chair, finished his paragraph, and then put the report back into its tray. Then he cracked his finger joints and regarded Philip fixedly for a moment without speaking. It was a trick he occasionally used to disconcert people.

"Well, Selwood," he said finally, "I've been in touch with——" he waved a hand mysteriously, "several sources of information about this affair of yours." He added without noticeable distress: "I'm afraid it's liable to turn out more serious than we thought."

"In what way?"

"The police are thinking of bringing a case against this fellow Weston, the husband—for manslaughter."

"Manslaughter!"

"Yes. They'll leave it till after the inquest, of course. But it's in their minds, and Weston knows it. So far as I can gather, he's no fool. He's engaged Maxwell Davies, who's the best police court solicitor in town. Now, I know Davies pretty well—we're in the same Lodge." He said with admiration: "He's a sharp fellow—a very sharp fellow indeed. You can take it as certain that he'll be up at the inquest, asking questions."

"What sort of questions?"

"I can't predict that. But if I were in his position I should do my damndest to kul the manslaughter charge before it

was made. If Davies can persuade the coroner that death was due even partly to the negligence of this hospital rather than the behaviour of his own client, the police will play safe. They never like to bite off more than they can chew. The charge will be dangerous driving." He waited for a moment for this to sink in. Philip's despondency increased. The coroner himself was alarming enough, without having to cope with a hostile and 'very sharp' solicitor in addition. "Naturally," went on Froy, "I can't be absolutely certain that this will happen, but it's what we have to be prepared for."

"But how can we?" asked Philip helplessly.

Froy looked almost benign. He had established his dominance. He was in charge. "This," he said, "is the way I look at it——"

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he shouted.

A young girl clerk scuttled nervously in with a cup of coffee, put it on his desk, and scuttled out again. He took a noisy gulp at the coffee, setting up a cycle of wheezing, asthmatic coughs. When these had settled, he wiped his mouth and went on.

"As I was about to say, the main thing is not to be taken by surprise. You'll be called, of course. Our own solicitor will go down with you, adequately briefed. He may or may not say anything. The very fact of him being there will show Davies that we mean business, and he can be ready to intervene if need be. The next thing is—the pathologist. That'll be old Lowry, and we needn't worry about him. I hear he didn't find anything out of the ordinary at the P.M.?"

"No."

"As regards the coroner himself, we could be worse off. On the whole, he's well-disposed to us, though not to the extent of letting us get away with anything. He's a pretty

busy chap and hasn't any interest in getting his name in the papers. All this is on the good side."

"And on the bad side?" Miserably, Philip answered his own question. "Oh, you don't need to tell me. There are the facts. They called for me for an hour and a half and couldn't get me. And in that time she died."

"That's about it," agreed Froy. "They'll try to suggest that if you'd gone along to see her earlier she might have lived." He asked dispassionately: "Could that be true?"

Philip winced.

"I know it's not a delicate question, but this is no time for delicacy. If I don't ask you, someone will."

"Your friend Mr. Davies?" asked Philip, with a touch of bitterness.

"Yes. You'll find he hasn't much delicacy, either. But to get back to the point . . . I don't know a damn thing about medicine. Could it have made that much difference?"

"It's not easy to say. Possibly."

"Yes," said Froy. "Of course, that's enough. That gives Davies what he wants. The fact is, there's no way of getting out of this inquest without admitting it. So there's only one course for us to take. We shall have to promise an inquiry."

Philip's heart sank. He had hoped that the inquest, though bound to be a profoundly unpleasant experience, would at least bring the matter to its conclusion. It seemed now that it was likely to be merely a prelude, a curtain-raiser, to an even more painful ordeal.

"Is that certain?" he asked.

"I think so. We shall be driven to it. And, that being so, it's better to forestall the demand by volunteering it. Then we can set up our own committee, and there shouldn't be too much publicity. Davies will be satisfied. It means we admit there is a *prima facie* case against the hospital, which is good enough for him. Once that's established, he may be



prepared to let things go through reasonably quietly. We can only hope the coroner will do the same. But you never know with these old boys. If he once smells a rat . . ."

"What sort of a rat?" asked Philip. "If we've already agreed that we're at fault——"

Froy gave a sigh, like a tutor burdened with a backward child. "There's something you've forgotten. Where were you when you were called?"

Miserable as he was, Philip had still the spirit to resent this patronising approach. "You know where I was," he retorted sharply.

As if deliberately confining himself to words of one syllable, Froy said: "Yes, but you can't tell them that. That would really raise a stink. You'll have to say—now, let me see——" He pondered. "Say you were attending another urgent case—in a way, it's true." His mind began to work rapidly. "Yes, that should do it. And then, before they have time to pursue the matter, our solicitor gets up and says we realise that this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs and are deeply concerned about it. We propose to institute a thorough inquiry as to why it was not possible to get into communication with you, even though you were available in the building." He leaned back in his chair with the air of a man pleasantly astonished at his own capacities. "That'll be good enough for him, I should imagine."

## *Chapter Eight*

THE INQUEST WAS FIXED for the beginning of the following week, and in the meantime there was nothing to do but carry on work as usual. It was not easy. Philip's mind was preoccupied, and he was frequently forgetful about small things. It was at this time that Sir Arthur showed the very

best side of his nature. He was patient and understanding. When Philip made minor errors, he would correct them himself without saying anything. He deliberately avoided painful subjects and made no further reproaches. In that line, he had said everything he wished to say. He had no desire to give further and unnecessary pain.

Philip felt profoundly grateful towards him. Such sensibility was, in his experience, not common among men in Benson-Gray's position. It was customary for eminent medical men to combine a strong sense of duty with an equally strong disregard for the personal feelings of those who helped them to perform it. In this respect Sir Arthur appeared to be an exception.

Philip did not conceal from himself the possibility that he received a great deal more than normal consideration on Pamela's account. Nevertheless, it is not easy for any man to conceal his true nature for long from his subordinates. Philip became convinced that Sir Arthur's reputation as an oblique and slightly untrustworthy character was unmerited. At the worst he was inquisitive and a little old-womanish. Like so many occupants of high positions, he had enemies ready to put the worst construction on everything he did.

Attention in the hospital was not focused so much on Philip as on Mola. The story of his suspension became rapidly current, though the reasons for it remained still in the form of rumour. Mola himself was hardly ever seen. He spent most of his time in his room, though once he was out of bed he was not considered to be entitled to take his meals there. He formed a habit of coming furtively down to the dining-room after all the others had left, gobbling a plateful of cold food, and returning as rapidly as possible to his lair.

When the inquest came off it was almost as an anticlimax. It followed exactly the course that had been expected, as if

it had been rehearsed. All the various points were brought up in the order that Froy had predicted, the correct cues were taken, each actor was word-perfect in his lines. Maxwell Davies was an older man than Philip had expected, with a lined face and steel-rimmed spectacles. He looked like a particular sort of schoolmaster that every man remembers from his childhood with a chill of trepidation—the one who has no difficulty with discipline, who claims (it seems justifiably) to have eyes in the back of his head and an instinctive comprehension of deceit. It was part of his method to play on such atavistic fears, and he was formidable in cross-examination. But on this occasion his claws were hidden, his object already attained by previous negotiation. He made the case for his client forcibly, but without malice.

Beside him sat Mr. Weston, red-faced and sweating with nervousness. He had plainly made an attempt to dress himself in a sober and respectable manner, but without success. Time and the force of habit had too strong a hold on him; he looked, thought Philip, like an unsuccessful music-hall comedian dressed up for a funeral. At intervals he would mop his brow with a pale blue silk handkerchief and whisper feverishly to Davies, as if suggesting questions to ask. Each time Davies shook his head in a bored, indifferent manner. He was accustomed to difficult clients.

Philip was not so nervous as he had expected. There was a perfunctory, dusty atmosphere hanging about the court, which made it hard to believe that anything of importance was being discussed. The procedure was slack and informal, with various people asking questions out of turn, and policemen tiptoeing in and out on squeaky boots—as if with the deliberate intention of excluding any element of drama from the case.

Froy was, of course, absent, but as the proceedings went

on his influence grew more and more apparent. It was impossible not to admire his organisation and forethought. Philip realised that his increasing confidence was due mainly to a conviction that Froy, whatever one might think of him personally, was a man who knew what he was doing, and that his reading of a situation was more than likely to be correct. This discovery filled him with uneasiness. There are, he had learnt from experience, certain people who have the gift of appearing to end up always on the winning side. There is a compulsion to follow them, to become involved in their success. It is the most intangible, the most essential ingredient of leadership. In Froy, it was at first concealed by his repellent exterior. Yet, when a crisis arose, it immediately became of the greatest importance to have his support. There was a dreadful, insidious risk of becoming dependent on him—for he was plainly a man who would not scruple to make use of such dependence if it suited him.

It was possible now to understand the relationship between Froy and Sir Arthur. They needed each other. Sir Arthur had influence, prestige, charm and intelligence. Yet somehow he was lacking in this very quality which Froy possessed. He never gave the impression of being a sure winner. Beneath all his grandeur, there was a certain fragility. . . .

Philip's evidence went through without incident. When the question of his whereabouts during the early hours of the morning arose, he answered as instructed.

"With another urgent case."

A slight frown appeared on the coroner's face. "For two hours?"

"Yes, sir."

"But surely you received a message——"

"No, sir. I didn't. I——"

To Philip's relief the hospital solicitor rose.

"Excuse me. If I may be allowed to say something on behalf of the hospital——"

"By all means."

"I am instructed by the Board of Governors to say that they are investigating this particular matter. There was some delay in Mr. Selwood being apprised of the state of the patient, which they consider regrettable, though it is thought unlikely that this had any adverse effect on the outcome of the case. The Board are proposing to set up a committee of inquiry at the earliest convenient date in order that the circumstances should be gone into in the fullest detail and a report prepared. It is then hoped that it will be possible to take steps to ensure that no such undesirable delays in communication shall occur on subsequent occasions, and furthermore——"

"Yes, yes," said the coroner testily. "That's quite enough. I understand." The hospital solicitor sat down with a trace of smugness. He had been hoping to conceal the implications of his statement beneath a mass of tedious verbiage, and he appeared to have succeeded. With a sense of victory, he noticed the coroner take a quick glance at his watch. There were two other inquests that morning and the court was running behind time.

But before giving way, the coroner fired one more shot.

"I presume," he said firmly, "that the findings of the inquiry will be made public?"

The solicitor had been hoping to avoid this one. But once asked, there was only one answer.

"Oh, of course," he said, as if shocked at the thought of any other possibility.

When the coroner summed up, he commented, among other things, on the action of the hospital.

"I am in complete agreement," he said, "with the state-

ment made on behalf of the Board of Governors. It should be possible to summon a surgeon in charge of a case immediately in the event of need, no matter whereabouts in the hospital he may be. 'Though I do not think it is likely, on the medical evidence, that this woman's life could have been saved, it is nevertheless extremely important that such things should not occur. I consider the hospital well-advised in holding the inquiry they propose, and I shall be interested to see the result.'

The verdict recorded was Accidental Death.

## *Chapter Nine*

THE RESULT OF THE INQUIRY created a considerable sensation in the hospital. To the experienced eye it was immediately apparent that something very serious had occurred, and that the Board were preparing to fight a rearguard action in the hope of cutting down publicity to a minimum. Curiosity was stimulated by the fact that the story, though filling in rapidly, was not yet complete. That the incident should have occurred on the very night when Mola was whisked away into seclusion, never to reappear, could hardly be dismissed as coincidence, and there were several ingenious theories concerning the connection between the two. But they remained theories. Apart from the higher authorities, the truth was known only to Philip, Mola, and Greenwood, none of whom were inclined to spread it abroad.

From all the speculation one salient fact emerged—that this was liable to mean trouble for Philip. If he was exonerated from blame, he would probably survive it, but even then it would not do him any good. It would always be remembered that he had been involved in an unsavoury affair. Though he came out without a stain on his character,

it was well known that there was a tendency for 'white-washing' to occur, and nobody could be certain that he had not been to some degree at fault. In the present state of surgery, when twenty or thirty first-class applicants were available for every vacancy, anything, even such a vague and insubstantial doubt, might be enough to eliminate a man from the running. If, on the other hand, he was found responsible and censured by the committee, his surgical career, at least in this country, was at an end.

Philip often wondered, during this time, how most of the people among whom he worked felt about him and the position he was in. It occurred to him that he really knew extraordinarily little about how he was regarded in the hospital. The house-men, the ward sisters, the nurses, the porters, the secretaries, the telephonists—he met them all every day; he was polite, occasionally made a joke or a comment on the weather—yet the truth was that he had taken no interest in them at all as individuals. They were the means by which he carried out his work. He had taken it for granted that they respected his efficiency and liked him for his courtesy. He had hoped to be generally popular, without inspiring any degree of affection. Affection implied intimacy; it was distracting and consumed valuable time. Like most men who have to work constantly on close terms with women, Philip had learnt that the intrusion of emotion was almost always to be avoided. It was a temptation at times. A little fuss, a little extra kindness when one was tired or discouraged; the gratification, without undue difficulty, of sexual curiosity; the passing-on of tedious and uncongenial tasks to one who would perform them as a labour of love. . . . But it was never worth it in the end. The price asked always turned out to be much higher than expected. The women concerned became possessive and demanding. When crossed they became impossible to work

with, either by reason of obstructiveness or rank malignancy. Nor was there any way of avoiding this unfortunate outcome by judicious selection in the first instance. Philip had come to the conclusion that there was no way of predicting how any woman would behave if denied what she considered an adequate return for her affections—except that she would behave badly.

Being rather withdrawn by nature, it had presented no difficulty to him to preserve the distance that he thought prudent. No doubt they thought him a little stiff, perhaps even snobbish. It was not important. The main thing was that the work should run smoothly, that the job should be efficiently done.

Philip did not, therefore, feel that there would be a great deal of personal sympathy with him. It would have been unreasonable to expect it. A few who liked him particularly would be sorry, but most of the others would be grateful for the excitement. They would look forward to the inquiry with the same innocent callousness as they awaited a trial for murder in the Sunday papers.

As far as the other registrars were concerned, it was hard for them to suppress a secret feeling of jubilation. They had always resented Philip's position. The removal of Jackson and the installation of a relatively inexperienced protégé of the professor had been an unpopular move. They were all highly, and not unreasonably, suspicious that, when the next consultant post became vacant, seniority might fight a losing battle against influence. Anything that might discredit Philip was to be welcomed as a factor in restoring the balance.

They felt this, they could not help feeling it, but they were not happy about feeling it. They had no personal animus against Philip and they were, on the whole, decent young men, neither more nor less charitable than others of



their age. But circumstances had forced them into a bitter competition for survival. It was as if the four of them were on a raft, with provisions for only two. If one man fell overboard, it was, of course, profoundly regrettable—yet it was possible to see the bright side.

Philip could understand their point of view, and felt that it would be unreasonable of him to resent it. But the fact remained that there was a gulf between himself and the other registrars. Their interests were divergent from his. He could not confide in them or trust them. It was an unpleasant discovery that, apart from Pamela, there was no one to whom he dared talk freely about the topic which was always uppermost in his mind. And Pamela was not enough. There was too much unity of interests, she was too openly partisan. He needed somebody friendly, sympathetic, understanding, yet with the dispassionate approach of one not emotionally involved. Somebody, preferably, of his own age and his own sex. Sir Arthur was too old, Greenwood too young. And in all the others he detected, or thought he detected, an attitude which repelled any inclinations towards confidence—the intense morbid interest shown towards a sacrificial offering.

It was in consequence of this that he found himself spending a good deal of time with Mola. Here, at least, he was safe from patronage, and it was a consolation to feel that there was someone whose predicament was worse than his own. By tacit consent, they very rarely mentioned the present situation. Mola, when encouraged by a sympathetic audience, was happy to talk about himself and his previous life. From his very childhood, he had been involved in dangerous and melodramatic incidents, and he had a multitude of stories to tell. When once he had forgotten his first diffidence, he would lose himself in his memories, and recall with great vividness the tragic events of years ago. Soon

Philip began to feel as if he had almost personal experience of the horrors of the German invasion, the inhuman routine of the prison camp, the loneliness of starting again, friendless and impoverished, in a strange land. He became fascinated by even the smallest details of the other's life. It was as if somewhere in Mola's story there lay a secret vital to the understanding of his own existence.

There was certainly one superficial lesson to be learned: that, compared to such events as Mola described, anything that happened at the Royal could only be regarded as of minor significance. Philip would come away at the end of one of these conversations with the satisfying feeling that his present circumscribed world, which tried so hard to convince him that it was the only world which mattered, had been put in its place, reduced to a mere pin-point on a map, of no more importance, in comparison with great and terrible events, than he himself. Its power to do harm was pathetically small. To assume, as he had been led to do, that what happened to him within the next year at the Royal was the determining factor in the success or failure of his whole life, was shown up, at least while the mood of exaltation lasted, as an absurdity.

Curiously, Mola did not share this attitude. Comparison with the terrible days which were gone had no effect in reducing for him the anxieties of his present situation. There was something absurd and rather depressing in the fact that a man who had barely survived torture and starvation should be driven to despair by a few harsh words from a middle-aged Scottish anaesthetist. And yet it was so. The reason for this contradiction was not so clear. Was it that he had been weakened and demoralised by suffering? Or was it, perhaps, that every man has a certain limited capacity for feeling pain, as a liquid has its boiling point, a temperature beyond which it cannot rise? The boiling point may be

a low one, the maximum pain felt at quite a minor level of stimulation—any further pressure applied is wasted once the maximum is reached. Might it be possible to reduce the greatest feats of human endurance to comparison with a simple physical law?

It soon became apparent to Philip that associated with Mola's indulgence in reminiscence about the past was a disinclination to consider practical steps for the immediate future. There was no question of his ever resuming work at the Royal, and his present equivocal position of 'suspension' was being maintained only because of a desire on the part of the authorities not to introduce further complications into the inquiry; afterwards, his appointment would certainly be terminated. He could count on no support from the Royal in finding himself another post. It was essential that he should work out some plan of action while there was still time.

The urgency of this was borne in on Philip by rumours which kept filtering through to him. On various occasions Mola had been seen wandering furtively about the corridors at night, usually in the vicinity of the operating theatre. As soon as he noticed anybody watching him, he would move off guiltily in the direction of his quarters before he could be asked what he was doing. The purpose of these expeditions was not difficult to guess. It was time, Philip decided, to stop beating about the bush.

One evening, during a lull in the conversation, he said: "By the way, I should be careful about strolling around the place in the small hours, if I were you. You nearly frightened one of the girls out of her wits the other night."

Mola's eyebrows lifted a little and his face became watchful. He made no reply.

"It *was* you, wasn't it?"

"Possibly. I like to take a little exercise occasionally. And during the day one meets too many people."

This was really too weak for words. Philip remonstrated. "Oh, come off it! Aren't you prepared to trust me?"

"Trust you?"

"Yes. It's all so damned absurd. I know what you were doing, hanging around the theatre, and you must know I know. You were looking for an opportunity to pinch some more of the stuff. It's pointless to pretend that you aren't still taking it, because I'm certain that you are." He struggled to make contact, to impress Mola with the necessity of confiding in him. "Don't think I shall sit in judgment on you. This is an illness, just like any other. I want to help you, but I can't unless you'll come out and admit it. God knows, you haven't much to lose. The way you're going on at the moment, you can't end up anywhere else but in trouble."

Mola thought for a moment. Then he probed, delicately, cautiously. "How could you help me?"

"I don't know yet. But if you'll put your cards on the table, I'll do what I can."

Mola half-closed his eyes, still undecided. "You wish me to say that I have been taking the drugs again, and that is why I became ill." He sighed. "You have been very kind to me and I do not wish to seem suspicious of you. But you must realise that such an admission could be very dangerous for me."

"I don't think so."

"You mean that I am already suspected? But what is suspected, and what can be proved, are two different matters. There is this inquiry . . . I cannot afford to say anything which could be used against me."

"There's no question of that. I give you my word not

to repeat anything you tell me in confidence." As Philip saw that Mola remained not completely convinced, a simple way out of the difficulty occurred to him. "And if that's not enough, all you have to do is to ask my advice professionally. That makes it a matter of professional secrecy."

Mola smiled. "Yes, of course, that is true. I shall be your patient. Though far outside your specialty, I am afraid."

"Never mind. I can perhaps put you on to someone who knows more about it, if nothing else."

"Very well, then." Now that he felt safe, Mola's relief at being able to unburden himself was obvious. "You are quite right, of course. I lied to you on that other occasion when I said I was cured of the habit. But it was not entirely a lie. I took the drugs now and then, when I was tired or depressed, but it was under control. That is possible, you know. One can take it, for periods of time, like alcohol or cigarettes or the pipe of opium which the Chinese smoke. I thought I might carry on always in this fashion." He shrugged his shoulders despondently. "It seems I deceived myself. When those troubles which you know about became very bad, I lost my control. . . . It was quite sudden. And then it was that I paid for not having abandoned the drugs completely. It is not such a terrifying step to increase the dose as to start all over again. And I had stocks to hand. It was very easy—like turning a switch. For a moment one ceased to care, ceased to watch, and then . . ."

It was not difficult for Philip to understand. With a little imagination, one could see Mola's addiction in relation to so many of the minor compulsions which dominated so-called normal minds. Compulsions to smoke too much, to overeat, to bite the nails, to indulge in promiscuous intercourse with women. Such conventional weaknesses were regarded with indulgent levity. One laughed at one's recurrent failures to give up cigarettes, at the ineffectual attempts of

fat women to follow a reducing diet. It was an acknowledged part of human nature. The curious thing was that while accepting our servitude to such puny masters, we should raise our hands in horror at one who succumbed to a much more subtle and powerful enemy.

"And how are you now?" asked Philip. "Have you gained control again?"

Mola shook his head. "That is not a thing one can do in a few days. And conditions are not suitable. It is necessary to become shut off, to insulate oneself from the world. And I have still—many worries."

"Yes, naturally." There was no need to go into detail. But there was one matter which Philip was curious about. "How are things going with Elizabeth?"

"As for that," said Mola, "there is no change. I still have no money. She writes to me almost every day. She says the time she has given me to pay is almost finished. Then she will make trouble for me." He scratched his chin meditatively. "But now I have so much trouble that I am not so frightened any more."

There was a silence. Now that Mola had admitted everything, he appeared to be waiting for Philip to take the initiative, to make good his promise to help. Philip was hesitant. He had not been speaking wildly. He had, in fact, prepared a plan for this very eventuality. But now that the time had come, he wondered how Mola was likely to take his suggestion.

Finally he said: "About your future . . ."

"Yes?"

"As you said a moment ago, you need a rest—some time to get yourself straightened out."

"Yes?" said Mola again.

"I was thinking," suggested Philip diffidently, "of Fartown Manor."

He waited for a reply, but Mola said nothing. He simply rubbed his eyes nervously and gazed out of the window.

"You've heard of it?" persisted Philip.

"Yes. I have heard of it."

"It's the only way. You know yourself it must be. And it won't be so bad. As a doctor . . ."

Mola shook his head with sudden decision. "No. I know it would be made easy for me, but—I could not face it."

"But what's your alternative?" insisted Philip. "As things go at present, you're a certainty to end up in the hands of the police. It's just a matter of time before you're caught pinching something or writing up phoney prescriptions. Then nobody can save you. For God's sake, man, you don't want to go to prison, do you?"

Mola shuddered and shook his head again. He was on the verge of tears. Philip felt ashamed of his own brutality but, after all, it was necessary. Somebody had to make Mola see sense, before it was too late.

"Well then, what are you going to do?"

Mola weakened. "If this became known . . . the inquiry . . ."

"That's easy. It won't get known. We can't move until after the inquiry, of course. But, once that's over, the sooner the better. I can arrange it for immediately afterwards."

Mola sighed and stared gloomily at the floor. The minutes ticked away as he waited, waited for some miracle to happen to release him from this awful decision. Perhaps he was praying—if so, his prayers were not answered. Finally, in a small voice, he said: "All right."

"Good," said Philip. "Then we can go ahead. Don't worry—I'm certain you're doing the right thing. You'll find it much easier than you expect. And, among other things, it gives you a chance to fix Elizabeth for good."

"You think so?"

"I'm certain. You leave her to me."

## *Chapter Ten*

IN THE CONVICTION that Elizabeth should be kept away from the hospital as much as possible, Philip had arranged to meet her at what she referred to rather grandly as 'her hotel'. Such pretensions were wasted on Philip, who knew the 'King Alfred' from his student days. It was a seedy, down-at-heel establishment which had always catered mainly for commercial travellers, though with decreasing success of recent years. It was as if even the travellers, not normally a class of men easily discouraged, had begun to sense something joyless and melancholy about its atmosphere.

When Philip went to keep his appointment, the 'King Alfred' was, as usual, empty of customers, and practically, it seemed, of staff also. The only sign of life was an aged waiter, visible through the door of the dining-room, in a black tail-coat shiny with grease, and trousers which fell like a pair of concertinas over his boots, listlessly setting tables for diners who would never arrive.

Philip looked at his watch. He was a few minutes early. The hall contained a single cane chair and he sat down to wait. The chair was plainly quite unused to such treatment. It squeaked and protested. There was an ominous creaking sound from underneath the seat. At that moment a small, rat-faced man with a waxed moustache came through from the kitchen. He looked at Philip suspiciously.

"Yes?" he said, in a hostile, nasal voice.

"I've arranged to meet somebody here. A Miss Elizabeth Fallon. She's staying in the hotel."

The man suddenly jabbed his right little finger in his ear,



rotated it several times at enormous speed, then extracted it and scrutinised it with some interest.

"Well?" he said finally.

"Can you tell me if she's about?"

"Couldn't say."

"Could you ring her room?"

The man laughed sharply. "What do you think this is—the Ritz? We don't have bedside telephones. They have to use the call-box outside the bar."

"Then I'd better go up and find her."

"Not allowed," retorted the receptionist, countering with effortless skill. "No visitors in bedrooms. Rule of the house."

"Then I'll just go on waiting here." Philip leaned up against the reception desk. The receptionist picked up the cane chair and began to scrutinise it underneath. "Only a light chair, this——" he muttered in an aggrieved tone. "More for ornament than anything. If people go chuckin' themselves into it——"

Further discussion was prevented by the entrance of Elizabeth. She was wearing an unsuitable flowered silk dress, which made her look older and fatter than before. She regarded Philip without enthusiasm.

"Hello," she said flatly. "Well, what is it you want?"

Philip looked meaningfully at the receptionist. "Can we talk in private somewhere?"

With obvious reluctance, the man said: "There's the sitting-room upstairs."

They went upstairs. The sitting-room was dark, ill-furnished and smelt perceptibly damp, but it was certainly private. It gave the impression that nobody had been inside its doors for some months.

"Now," said Elizabeth militantly. "What are you after this time?"

"I'm not after anything," said Philip. Elizabeth's attitude did not make him angry. He felt, instead, rather sorry for her. She was going to lose—that was certain—and though she was not a pleasant woman, she had right on her side up to a point. The financial loss alone was probably quite important to her, in addition to the blow to her pride.

"Oh, I didn't suppose you wanted anything for yourself. I'm not so stupid as that. You've come to see me about——" she jerked her head in the general direction of the hospital, "—about *him*, haven't you? Though it's a mystery to me why you should bother." She looked at him, her eyes narrowed with cunning. "I've got to know a few things about you, this last week or two. It seems you're quite a coming young man—going around with the boss's daughter and all that. All I can say is—for a chap in that sort of position you've got a damned funny taste in friends."

Philip winced. He was aware that many people might take the same attitude towards his friendship with Mola, though few were likely to express it with such monumental coarseness. Failure, misery, defeat were unclean things—the healthy were expected to shun them like the agents of some infectious disease. Philip could not bring himself to accept this convention. Sometimes, however, he wondered how it was that he had been led into this particular relationship with Mola. His feelings towards the other man—a mixture of interest, pity, and irritation—were not what he was accustomed to regard as the basis of friendship. At times it was as if some compulsive force was at work, forcing the two of them together whether they liked it or not.

But all this was nothing to do with Elizabeth. The main thing was to say what he had to say and get out of this ghastly hotel as soon as possible.

"I came here," said Philip, "to tell you something which

may prove to be a disappointment. I'm afraid you're not going to get any money out of Mola."

Elizabeth breathed heavily. "So that's it! We're back to the old story. He can't pay, and will I wait a little longer? Well, I'll tell you straight, here and now, Mr. Selwood, I won't! Unless that money gets here by Saturday morning, I'll——"

"You'll do what?"

"I've told you already what I'll do. And I mean it, what's more!"

"You'll make allegations against him which will cause him to lose his job?"

"Yes. If you put it like that——"

"It would be a waste of time. He's already lost his job."

"Lost it?" she cried in amazement. "But why—what for?"

"The reasons are technical. If I told you, you wouldn't understand them. But the salient point is that, if he's out of a job, he can't pay you and you can't hurt him."

Elizabeth laughed viciously. "Oh, can't I? He's got to get another job, hasn't he? You're probably right about the money. I shall never get it. But, my God, I'll make his life a misery. He won't get away with it. Wherever he goes, I'll fix him, I promise you."

Philip shook his head. "He's not going to another job."

"Then where is he going? He's got to go somewhere, hasn't he?"

Philip rose to his feet. Now was the time for his bomb-shell.

"He's going as a voluntary patient into a mental hospital," he said. "I don't think you'll be able to do him much harm in there."

## *Chapter Eleven*

ONE MORNING A WEEK LATER, Sir Arthur said: "How's our friend upstairs getting on?"

"You mean Mola?"

"Yes. Do you see him at all?"

"Now and then." Philip, for some reason, felt guilty. Guilty about what? He was not sure. Sir Arthur, he knew, would disapprove of any close association with Mola, but he had no real right to do so. There was nothing to be ashamed of in seeing a lot of Mola. And yet Sir Arthur had the power within him to make Philip feel disloyal, not to any particular individual, but to a sense of caste.

"Have you any idea what his plans are?"

"Nothing very definite. I think he intends to leave as soon as the inquiry is over."

"Yes," assented Sir Arthur. "I think he ought to stay until then. He'll probably be called. But afterwards, the sooner he gets out, the better."

The contempt in his voice was unconcealed. Philip felt bound to protest. "He's not a bad fellow, you know."

Sir Arthur retreated immediately to strong ground. "No doubt you're right. I don't know him personally. But would you like to have an anæsthetic from him?"

"No," admitted Philip. "I must confess I wouldn't."

"As a man," went on Sir Arthur generously, "I'm sorry for him. But as professor of surgery I want him out of this place before he can do any further harm." His eyes flashed towards Philip, regarding him closely. "Where is he thinking of going next, do you know?"

Philip felt his face reddening. The question put him in difficulties. To answer truthfully was to break a promise; a refusal to answer would appear surly. Sir Arthur insisted on

keeping up a pretence that he was in no way hostile to Mola, and if this had been true, his questions would have been without any special significance. But, as things were, Philip had an uneasy suspicion that information about Mola passed on to Sir Arthur was information given to an enemy, which might be later used to Mola's disadvantage.

"I couldn't say," he answered finally. After all, that was fair enough. He had not said he didn't know—he was merely prevented from saying anything.

Sir Arthur accepted the reply, though from his manner Philip suspected that he was not taken in by it. Later, the old man said: "Have you been notified yet of the date of the inquiry?"

"No, sir."

"It's pretty certain to be next Wednesday. But that's unofficial so far. I have to go to London on the Monday for a few days but I shall be back in time to attend. From your point of view I think it's very important that I should be there."

"I seem to have made an awful lot of trouble for you," said Philip ruefully.

Sir Arthur pushed his apologies aside. "No, no—don't think of it like that. I want to do what I can to help. In my time I've had a great experience of committees. If something goes wrong, naturally they want to put the onus on to someone, and the pleasantest way out from their point of view is to put it on to a person who isn't actually present at the meeting or isn't represented. That's why it's so important to attend, even if you don't say a word. Chaps like Huxtable, for instance, can't see that. If there's nothing on the agenda which interests them, they stay away. And the next thing they know, somebody's pulled a fast one." Sir Arthur shook his head to indicate his disapproval of such tactics. "So it's best to be prepared."

At that point he dropped the subject. But, as he was about to leave the hospital he said casually to Philip: "There are one or two matters I'd like to talk over with you before I leave for London. When is your next free evening?"

"This Sunday."

"Excellent." Sir Arthur made a note in his engagement book. "Then perhaps we could expect you round to dinner?"

There were only the three of them present. "I might almost say—a family party," said Sir Arthur. He had provided an excellent dinner. Though he ate and drank little himself, he repeatedly pressed the young people to wine. He seemed very anxious that the evening should be a success.

Philip lit his cigar, and said: "I'm almost beginning to feel there's a justification for the food at the Royal. At least it makes you appreciate a dinner like this."

"Is the food still bad?" asked Sir Arthur sympathetically.

"Dreadful. Was it bad when you were a resident?"

Sir Arthur gave a nostalgic sigh. "It was inedible—quite, quite inedible. I remember when Roderick was in your job—I was just a student then but I heard about it—he was in trouble for pelting the head cook with a plateful of mince pies. Very damaging missiles they were too, I can assure you. Afterwards, when he got on the staff, he swore he'd do something about improving the food, but nothing ever came of it. Even he wasn't strong enough for that. We were always protesting, of course. And then we used to get fed up, and go to the 'Bunch of Grapes' across the road. Do you do that now?"

"Sometimes. Not often."

"Things have changed," said Sir Arthur sadly. "The house-men are older, more serious. It's only natural—most

of them have spent a few years in the Army before they come to us. I can't help feeling it's a pity. In the old days we worked hard, possibly even harder than you do now. But I think we had more fun. We lived for the hospital. During the years we were there we didn't know anything else. Now all the boys have outside interests. There isn't the same corporate spirit."

"I suppose not."

"The bad food, the pay, and the uncomfortable quarters—we complained but we didn't really mind. It was all part of an adventure somehow. Now you're better off financially——"

"Not much," put in Philip.

"As you say, not much. But money isn't really important when you're young. You think it is, but, believe me, it isn't. You come here and think how lucky I am—I can sleep in a comfortable bed, eat and drink what I choose, work as little as I want. . . . I don't have to get up in the night even, so long as I have a registrar to do the dirty work." He held up a hand as Philip began to protest. "Oh yes, I know it only too well. You see, I used to think exactly the same myself. When Arthur Henderson, who was my boss at one time, used to talk to me like this, I listened to him with great respect, just as you're doing now. But all the time I thought he was a pompous old fool." He laughed. "Well, I was wrong. I know now that he envied me as I envy you, and as you'll envy some other struggling ambitious young devil in thirty years' time. And perhaps you'll remember me then, and know how I feel. You'll wish you had your youth back, to make the most of it. But it'll be too late. Have some more port?"

"Thank you very much, sir."

Sir Arthur looked at the ash on his cigar. Philip had a sudden suspicion that only now was he coming to what he

really wished to say. The nostalgia had been genuine, and yet somehow there was the impression that, as with so many of Sir Arthur's emotions, it was only skin-deep, the plaything of a mood. Lurking behind it, held in control until the scene had been set, the overture completed, was the main object of the evening.

"Yes," went on Sir Arthur, "youth is the great virtue. You should do as much as possible while you're young, and as quickly. I've been thinking a lot about you two recently. I suppose you still want to get married?" he asked with a smile.

"Why, certainly!" said Philip.

"And you, dear?" He turned to Pamela.

"Don't pull my leg, Daddy. You know I do."

"Good. I can honestly say I'm glad about that. As you know, I wanted you to delay your engagement for a while until Philip was well settled in. Well, I think now that he is settled in, we needn't delay much longer. Once this wretched inquiry is out of the way, I suggest we make an announcement. Is that agreeable to all parties?"

Pamela's eyes sparkled. "Oh, that would be wonderful! Wouldn't it, Philip? We could make a splash of it—have a party——"

"Yes—fine——"

"When you'll be able to get married is another matter," went on Sir Arthur. "I should imagine that will depend on your getting a non-resident post. We shall have to see." He said vaguely: "I doubt whether Crabtree will be with us after next summer . . . But it's early days to talk of that."

They talked for a while of the engagement. Then Sir Arthur looked at his watch and said: "I hate to bring you down to earth like this, but I think before you leave we ought to have just a few words about this tiresome business next week——"



Pamela took her cue immediately. She got up from the table. "I'll leave you to it," she said. "I have to see Mrs. Barnes about tomorrow's shopping anyway."

"When you do," said Sir Arthur, "I'd like you to give her my congratulations on the dinner. It was really quite exceptional."

When Pamela had left, he went on: "You'll find Pamela an extremely competent housewife for her age. She's managed things here for ten years now—ever since my wife died. She has a wonderful way with servants."

"I'm sure she has," agreed Philip enthusiastically.

Sir Arthur twisted the stem of his glass. For the first time that Philip remembered, his manner seemed shy and embarrassed. "And she's really not so spoilt as you might expect, considering that she's had all her own way for so long. You see, Philip," he went on confidentially, "I don't blind myself to the fact that the circumstances of her upbringing haven't been exactly ideal. She was quite young when her mother died and since then she's been, so far as I'm concerned, the only person in existence who really mattered. I'd do anything for her and—children are very quick—she soon found that out. But she's an independent girl and she's never exploited it. Personally I think that's a very good sign. A girl who can stand up to a doting father can stand up to anything."

Philip judged that no comment was required from him on these confidences. He contented himself with an understanding smile.

"But I mustn't go on talking about Pamela. Parents ought never to talk too much about their children—especially to prospective sons-in-law."

"But I like to hear it," said Philip, quite genuinely.

"Once or twice, perhaps," admitted Sir Arthur, "but in due course I shall repeat myself, and then you'll think I'm

getting senile. It's one of the disadvantages of having a long memory—I can still remember how I felt when I was your age. You no doubt have it in your mind that you know a good deal more about Pamela than I do. And you're almost certainly right—that's rather alarming, in its way. However, the main thing is that I'm sure you'll make her happy."

"I'll do my very best, sir."

"I'm sure you will." Sir Arthur leaned forward and put his elbows on the table. "And now—to business. I'd better tell you all I know about the proposals for the inquiry. The committee will be partly medical and partly lay. The chairman of the Board will preside. That's all much as might be expected. There's only one complicating factor. The Ministry of Health are sending an observer up from London—a Colonel Langley——" His mouth puckered with distaste. "I don't know the chap at all—he's somebody quite obscure in the profession, an administrator of sorts. I shouldn't imagine he'll go looking for trouble. My experience of those people is that they're usually all for a quiet life. No," he said, "I don't think you've anything to be afraid of. In fact, that's the most important thing I wanted to say to you—not to panic or lose your head. Not that I think for a moment that you will. I'm told you were awfully good at the inquest."

"That was easy. I simply did what Mr. Froy told me."

"Yes," agreed Sir Arthur, "there's no doubt that Froy's a very good man."

Philip felt it essential that something should be said about Froy. "He may be. But I don't like him."

Sir Arthur nodded, without surprise. "He's really quite prodigiously unpopular, I believe. I wouldn't say I had any affection for him myself. But it's one of the penalties of being in a position of authority—one has to pick one's

associates for ability rather than charm. If you want something done at the Royal, it's a great deal easier to get it done with Froy than against him. As far as executive action is concerned, he is the key man. You'll find men of that sort in any great institution."

"It hardly seems right," pointed out Philip, "that he should have so much power."

"I'm afraid it's inevitable. You see, Philip——" Sir Arthur became confidential, flatteringly man-to-man, "—hospital politics are a complicated business. Before so very long, I hope, you'll be on the staff yourself, and it's a good idea that you should know how things are managed. In the Royal there are up to fifteen consultants, all of theoretically equal status, each one boss in his own unit. Each of them wants as many beds, as much equipment and staff, as he can get hold of. There isn't nearly enough to satisfy everybody. In a situation like that, you'll always find that one or two men get almost everything they want, and the rest get practically nothing. It depends on how badly you want things and how much trouble you're prepared to put into it. Now Froy has a great deal more time than any of us, and he's prepared to go to a lot of trouble. If you have his cooperation, it makes all the difference." Seeing that Philip still looked doubtful, he went on: "You may not like that very much, but there it is. You can't get away from it."

There was something very appealing to Philip in the fact that Sir Arthur should trouble to excuse himself to him. And the old man was obviously sincere. But he was still not entirely satisfied.

"What did Roderick think of Froy?" he asked.

"Roderick," said Sir Arthur, "was a law unto himself. And in those days Froy had only just been appointed; he hadn't the influence he has now. But I can tell you this: if

Roderick had thought it was for the good of the hospital, he would have worked with the very devil himself. He said that to me once—in so many words. And I always remembered it.” A cloud passed over Sir Arthur’s face. “It helped me once to make a terrible decision—in the worst moment of my life. The dreadful part of it was that it meant going against Roderick’s own wishes. . . . But I’ve never regretted it,” he added with unnecessary emphasis. “Never.”

Philip refrained from asking him what the decision was, in spite of his extreme curiosity. If Sir Arthur wished to disclose the details, he would no doubt do so spontaneously. But he did not. Indeed, from the expression on his face, he appeared to be already regretting having said so much. He returned to generalities.

“You see,” he said, “what it comes down to, in my view, is that you have to act, for the most part, on some general principle. If you keep that in mind, you can’t go far wrong. In the nature of things, you can’t always choose your associates, and you’ll have to do things now and then which are repugnant to you. But if you’re acting on your principles, you’re all right. In my experience, there are very few people who can rest content if they are working only for themselves. You find all sorts of the most unlikely people—stockbrokers, actors, journalists—trying to make out that what they do isn’t just a job to make money, but that they perform some sort of essential service to mankind. We’re lucky; we don’t have to pretend. We have something very valuable—not all this romantic trash you see on the pictures, but a complete conviction that we’re doing something worth doing. I think, for all its faults, the profession in this country is just about the best in the world, and I’ve tried to do what I can for it. That’s the principle I work on. If what I do is good for the profession and good for the

Royal—then I'm contented. No doubt you think that's a limited outlook?"

"Oh no, sir—not at all."

"Oh, but it is," corrected Sir Arthur. "It's designed to be. The only way to get anything done in this world is to limit your field of action to what you really know about, and believe in. If you take too much into consideration you end up by being completely ineffectual. That's one of the things," he said reflectively, "which gets easier as you get older. You become naturally more concentrated and less muddled. You get to know what you really believe and what you don't care twopence about. It's a great relief. No, youth is the difficult time—when you're still not certain where you stand."

Philip nodded solemnly. Mellow with wine and the sentimental occasion, he was in no mood to argue. Moreover, what Sir Arthur said appeared to him as sound good sense. Philip felt a wave of affection for the old man. He was really quite a remarkable character—so helpful and reliable, and with such an extraordinary knack of seeing other people's problems. It was a wonderful thing to have him behind you. And not him alone. For through Sir Arthur it was possible to feel somehow specially incorporated in the organisation of which he was so distinguished a member, the whole proud, demanding and immensely reassuring body of men who represented the profession of surgery. On this particular evening Philip regained something which he had lost years ago with the death of his parents—the sense of belonging to a family. To sit here, listening to Sir Arthur ramble on, like one's own father, being (as was only fitting in a father) a little sententious, a little boring—all this was the source of a unique and unexpected pleasure. He suddenly felt quite amazingly contented—and a little sleepy.

Sir Arthur noticed him stifle a yawn, and smiled. "It's the port," he said, "and too many late nights. I must let you go soon. I'm afraid I've been rather garrulous. I got you here to talk about the inquiry and I've hardly mentioned it." He paused to light a cigarette. "Really, there's very little to say. As far as you're concerned, all you have to do is to answer whatever questions they ask you truthfully and honestly."

Philip nodded rather torpidly. It was one of those shatteringly obvious pieces of advice which one's elders tended to bring out, presumably under the impression that it carried some original message.

"A lot of the facts will go to the committee in writing," went on Sir Arthur. "Reports will be put in by various people. As head of the unit concerned, I shall put one in myself. You'll find the ground, as it were, prepared for your own evidence. They will want, as you understand . . . rather more detail than at the inquest."

"Yes," said Philip, waking up a little. "I was going to ask you about that. In connection with Mola——"

"Never mind about him," advised Sir Arthur. "You're the man we're concerned with—not Mola."

"I know, but—you see," said Philip awkwardly, "he's in a rather jumpy frame of mind. I keep telling him he'll be treated fairly——"

"Of course he will."

"He seems to have the idea that because he's a foreigner and so on, everything will be blamed on to him."

"I believe," said Sir Arthur, "that addicts do tend to develop attitudes of that sort. There's a certain fundamental instability, of course."

Philip was conscious that he had not made his point absolutely plain.

"What I mean is—I wouldn't say anything about Mola

that wasn't definite, not just surmise, you see. After all, I don't *know* . . ."

Sir Arthur brushed this aside. "Don't bother your head about all that," he said. "When the time comes you'll find it all quite easy if you just keep calm. And, as for the result—one can't say, of course, what it will be . . . Still——" He pursed his lips with a suggestion of complacency. "I have a certain influence, and Froy has friends on the lay side." He rose from the table. "I think, between us, we shall manage to pull you through. But it's half-past eleven and I seem to recollect that you go on duty again at midnight. I mustn't condone any misdemeanours on your part."

## *Chapter Twelve*

AS THE DAYS PASSED and the date of the inquiry grew nearer, Philip began to brood increasingly on his conversation with Sir Arthur. It was easy, he knew, to imagine meanings which had never been present. But there had been ominous remarks: "I think it's very important from your point of view that I should be there," "Between us, we should manage to pull you through", and one or two others of a similar nature. They implied a warning that things might be difficult, that, possibly, there were certain people on the committee of inquiry who were not well disposed towards Philip. That, in fact, without Benson-Gray and Froy working on his side, there was every likelihood of disaster.

If he had enemies on the committee, Philip was naturally concerned to know who they might be. It was not easy to speculate, since the precise constitution of the committee had not been disclosed to him. On the other hand, there was one very strong suspect indeed—Isherwood.

He did not imagine that Isherwood's antipathy would have any personal basis, but would be founded solely on his association with Sir Arthur. Philip had recently come to realise that the enmity between the two men was not a simple matter of rival ambitions. They stood on either side of a vast psychological gulf. They were Cavalier and Roundhead, Catholic and Communist. Each, in his own way, represented an entirely different conception of life.

Though Sir Arthur expressed a belief in concentration of aim, this belief was held with reservations—and the reservations were fundamental. He did not put them into words, because they were so much a part of him that it never occurred to him to do so. They showed in his manners, his mode of speech and dress, the way in which he lived. He believed, quite simply, in being gentlemanly. A gentleman, in Sir Arthur's world, might behave well or badly, but even if he behaved badly he did so in a way peculiar to a gentleman. He did not use this particular word aloud; it would have made him sound too old-fashioned. "A gentleman nowadays," he had once said contemptuously, "means anybody who goes into a gentlemen's lavatory." But the conception remained.

Sir Arthur was no fool and he was very interested in people. He knew perfectly well that a great many people did not share his views. He was familiar with those who hated gentility, those who affected to despise it while secretly admiring it, those (poor devils!) who strove for it without hope of attainment. But what he could not be expected to understand was an attitude which recognised all the standards which governed his own conduct, and regarded them as merely a series of outdated conventions, to be neither admired nor resented, but worth using occasionally in the service of a more important aim.

This attitude was exemplified by Isherwood. It was



noticeable that Isherwood made a great many contradictory impressions on different people, according to the relation they bore to his work. To Isherwood his work, his unit, his ambitions, were of such supreme importance that all his other activities were conditioned by them. He was by nature a man of dour, gloomy personality—but if it was necessary he could put on a show of vivacity that was quite astonishing. He could be kind, persuasive, attentive, absent-minded, blustering, by turns. He dressed well when it was necessary to make an impression and shabbily when it was not. His large house, his Rolls-Royce limousine and chauffeur, even, it sometimes seemed, his wife and family, were mere theatrical props to fit in with a popular conception of success.

When Philip encountered Isherwood around the hospital, he received only the most perfunctory smile of recognition. His face was familiar but he had no connection with the unit and was not therefore regarded as of any significance. Nor was Philip anxious to cultivate Isherwood's acquaintance, since Isherwood was well known to be in opposition to Sir Arthur, and too great a show of friendliness might be construed as disloyalty to his chief.

On the morning after Sir Arthur's departure for London, however, he ran across Isherwood in the surgeons' changing-room. They had each just finished an operating list. Ordinarily, Isherwood would have given a sort of grunt and left it at that, but today he seemed to have time to spare.

"Hello, Selwood," he said affably. "All on your own?"

"Yes. Sir Arthur's away for a day or two."

"Been doing anything interesting?"

"Not really. Just a routine list."

"I suppose so." Isherwood spoke with commiseration,

as if to imply that nothing of any great interest ever did happen on Sir Arthur's firm. He put on his glasses and searched in his locker for his collar and tie. "Now, I've just been doing something extraordinarily interesting."

"Really, sir?"

"Yes. It's an idea I got from a chap in Philadelphia. I met him last time I was over there and we've kept up a correspondence ever since. This particular thing arose out of my Hunterian Lecture. Have you read it, by the way?"

"I'm afraid I haven't," said Philip shamefacedly. "Really, there's been so much to do——"

Isherwood was in a mood to forgive anything. "I'll send you a transcript," he said generously. "Well, after the lecture was published, he wrote to me with this suggestion. It arose out of a combination of his work and mine, do you see——" The excitement mounted in his flat northern voice. Before he had had time to finish brushing his hair, he threw the brushes down, fished a piece of scrap paper out of his pocket, and sat down at the table. "Look, this is the principle of the thing. I'll draw it for you."

For the next quarter of an hour, Isherwood drew, talked, explained, explored difficulties, refuted arguments, sketched out lines of development and research. It was difficult to resist his energy and enthusiasm, and his egoism had a certain naïve quality which saved it from being repellent. In comparison to Sir Arthur, he impressed Philip as a rather simple soul. For nearly six months now he had almost ignored Philip. Now, suddenly, he was treating him as an old friend, presumably with some object in view. It was all a little crude. But perhaps the most engaging feature about it was Isherwood's assumption that the way to be flattering and fascinating was to talk about himself.

At the end, Philip asked: "And how did the operation go?"

Isherwood tossed the operation on one side. "Oh, all right. There wasn't much to it. But that's neither here nor there. It's this next week or two that's going to count. You see, we're breaking new ground. We don't know what's going to happen to his blood chemistry." He smiled delightedly. "Not the foggiest idea."

As if conscious that this sounded a little irresponsible, Isherwood said in qualification: "Of course, the boys will be working on it all the time. It'll mean a lot of work for everyone. The trouble is, we haven't really sufficient staff for the amount of research we're doing. There's no wonder the Americans get ahead of us; they've got everything, their own chemists and pathologists, research assistants by the dozen. They've got the right idea over there."

"You don't think," suggested Philip, tentatively producing one of Sir Arthur's favourite opinions, "that it's possible to become over-specialised?"

Isherwood was not impressed. "Oh, theoretically, I suppose. But we don't have to worry about that. In England our troubles are all in the opposite direction. Routine general surgery has its place, but the teaching hospitals ought to be doing something new. It's uphill work, though, I can tell you. Every time I put a new project up to the Board, you can bet your boots that some old diehard will get up and ask if it's really in the best interest of the patient. As if *all* medical research wasn't done in the interests of the patient!"

Philip looked at Isherwood sharply. Yes, he really believed it. That was his strength. If he once allowed himself to speculate on his own motives, to realise how large a part the satisfaction of his own curiosity and ambition played in his work, he might lose a great deal of his driving force.

"However," Isherwood went on more cheerfully, "we

mustn't be too impatient. The tide's running the right way. All over the country, the special units are expanding. They produce results, that's why. The results mean prestige for the hospitals, and the hospitals like it—they can see something for their money. Most of the surgical professorships in the last two or three years have gone to research men. . . .” Philip wondered if he detected a slight gleam of anticipation in Isherwood's eyes. But it was only momentary. Suddenly the conversation was redirected towards himself. “A young chap like you ought to be thinking on those lines. Are you writing anything?”

“No, I'm afraid not. I——”

“You ought to be,” said Isherwood accusingly. “All my chaps are. I tell them they have to, if they work for me. It doesn't matter how small it is, a group of unusual cases, a collection of statistics—one of the journals will take it, if it's properly presented. You've got to do it nowadays. Mind you,” he said, as if anxious to be fair, “I'll agree that it's much easier if you're working in the right atmosphere.” Philip, it was clearly implied, was working in the wrong atmosphere. “What you need is stimulation.”

Philip nodded politely. He was a young man by no means averse to stimulation, but, as far as he was concerned, he doubted very much whether Isherwood was in a position to provide it. This notion of a solemn freemasonry of surgical research workers, stimulating each other in priggish little discussions and incubating an endless series of articles for various learned publications, mainly for the purposes of self-advertisement, had no appeal for him. He wanted badly to succeed in his profession—but not badly enough for that.

Isherwood began to button up his waistcoat. “Of course,” he said, “there's a lot to be said for Sir Arthur. Grand old man and all that. He has a great feeling for

the hospital. But he's getting near retiring age now. I don't suppose he's got more than a couple of years to go, has he?"

"I really couldn't say exactly."

"Something like that, anyway." Philip was prepared to bet that Isherwood knew this date, not only to the year, but to the month. "It could easily make a big difference to you. I was just thinking, as a matter of fact, of a friend of mine, a chap who came back to his own hospital at the end of the war. He thought he was all set up for a very good job. He'd been first assistant to the senior surgeon just before he joined the Army, and done very well. But when he came back, the old boy had retired—couldn't do a thing for him. He never stood a chance. We were all very sorry for him."

Isherwood adjusted his spectacles and peered meaningly through them at Philip. Philip tried to look interested but non-committal. He was waiting to learn what Isherwood was driving at.

Isherwood offered cigarettes from a gold case. Once again he switched the conversation. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-eight."

"Not bad for nowadays, considering the war and everything. You're still fairly young. But you can't afford to waste any time. A year or two in general surgery should be quite enough. After that—well, just between ourselves, my particular unit is almost bound to expand. You might do worse than apply for one of our jobs. That's if you're interested, of course."

This last qualification was purely formal. That anyone should be other than enchanted to be offered a job on his unit did not present itself to Isherwood as a serious possibility.

"Oh, naturally," said Philip.

"In the meantime, if you have any time to spare, don't

hesitate to come around and see what we're doing. We'd always be delighted to show you."

"That's very kind of you, sir."

"Not a bit. Though I suppose you're pretty tied up at the moment, what with this inquiry and so on. . . ."

"Yes," said Philip cautiously, "that's true."

"It's an unpleasant business," said Isherwood. There was an increased intensity about his manner. "I don't think it should do you any harm. The worse thing to happen would be for it to get tied up in a lot of hospital politics. I sincerely hope personalities won't play too large a part."

"Do you think that's likely?" asked Philip. He was not clear as to the meaning of this last cryptic remark.

"It's a possibility," said Isherwood heavily. "I haven't any personal interest in the matter at all. I hardly know this fellow Mola. But it's pretty obvious, from what I hear, that there are certain people who would be happy to use him as a scapegoat. Now, whatever he's done, I don't think that's good enough."

"Oh, nor I!" protested Philip. "But I can't think that anybody——"

Isherwood said sceptically: "Can't you? You'd be surprised. And make no mistake about it, if the inquiry finds it proved that Mola's been taking drugs, that won't be the end of it. The General Medical Council will have to be informed. He may get struck off the register." As an afterthought, he added: "It wouldn't do you any good either. Everyone would say you'd been covering yourself by throwing the blame on to him."

There was, Philip decided, a limit to what he was called upon to stand in the way of innuendoes, even from his superior. "No doubt," he said curtly. "But since I've no intention of doing any such thing, the question doesn't arise."

Isherwood was not offended. "That's true," he said. He stood for a moment, as if searching his mind to discover if he had anything else he wanted to say. Deciding that he had not, he turned abruptly to the door. "I'm going now," he said. "Good-bye."

Throughout lunch, and the out-patient session which followed it, Philip worried over what Isherwood had said. The whole tone of the conversation had been objectionable, a clumsy attempt to damage his relations with Sir Arthur. The clumsiness lay in the assumption that everybody was activated by the same motives as Isherwood, a driving ambition to succeed at all costs. A great deal of what he said was undoubtedly true. Sir Arthur's days of power were numbered. Philip was quite prepared to accept the claim that the future lay with Isherwood and his kind—it was a common feeling among the younger men. But what of it? There had been a suggestion that he should turn an eye to the main chance, exchange his loyalties, and join with the others in writing off Sir Arthur as an antique survival of a bygone age, soon to be swept into the dustbin. This he was not prepared to do. If Isherwood had been endeavouring to seduce Philip from Sir Arthur, his attempt had been a failure.

If, on the other hand, his object had simply been to confuse and disturb, he had had considerable success. There was something unsettling in the very fact that the approach had been made. Philip was under no illusions as to his own value and importance. As a surgeon in training, he was one among thousands in a grossly crowded market. His work was satisfactory, but by no means outstanding. To Sir Arthur he had a personal importance because of Pamela, but there was no obvious reason why Isherwood should care to play up to him. Unless—and he realised that

this must be the case—it was all connected with the inquiry.

The out-patients came and went. There were a great many of them and Philip had to work alone in the absence of his chief. Gradually he fell behind with the appointments, and the benches outside the clinic became filled with serried ranks of disconsolate patients. Ordinarily he enjoyed this part of his work, but today everything seemed stale and repellent—he felt suffocated by the smell of humanity and damp mackintoshes. Somewhere at the back of his mind was a sense of grievance, not against any specific person, but against his own position in the scheme of things. In everything that mattered, it had been impressed upon him, he was insignificant, he was impotent, he was dependent. It was kind of Sir Arthur to help him, but he was tired of being in need of help. There rose within him the first faint stirrings of rebellion.

In this frame of mind he worked throughout the afternoon, seeing some forty or fifty patients. He questioned them, examined them, read the results of their investigations and then, to the best of his ability, gave judgment. The judgment might be of any severity—an acquittal, with a clean bill of health, a small sentence in hospital, a lifetime of pain or discomfort, death. . . . One every ten minutes. There was hardly time for sympathy.

For the first time it occurred to him to wonder if these people too were resentful, harbouring within them a core of hatred for the power he held over them. Occasionally, among the most sensitive and intelligent, he had noticed a certain reserve, a suspicion of the quick, ready smile, the reassuring word. He resolved to ask one of them some time. But the thought was soon lost from his mind. He had too many other things to do.



## *Chapter Thirteen*

THE OUT-PATIENT SESSION drew to its end. It was autumn now, and the shadows closed in towards the late afternoon. The consultants, one by one, climbed into their cars and departed. Philip's place in the hospital grew in importance as the light failed and his superiors left for the comfort of their homes. By seven o'clock, when the bell rang for dinner, the car park was empty, the rain splashed undisturbed in the puddles on the drive, the lamps were lit. Inside the building the corridors were quiet, the out-patient clinics locked for the night; the day nurses began to fidget and look at their watches, waiting for the change of duties.

This hour had always had a special significance to Philip. Once it had been the hour of apprehension, when he had found upon himself a burden of responsibility to which he felt unequal. Then, as he gained confidence, he had looked forward to the evening as the time when he was in sole command, free from the fetters of authority. But that phase also had passed. Now once again the evening meant thought, it meant uncertainty, it meant loneliness. Increasingly he found himself begging Pamela to come down to the hospital and keep him company. It was by no means a small service to ask. Often he would be called away, and she would perhaps sit for several hours waiting in his room, and only see him for a short while before it was time to return home. She waited patiently, she was placid, she never complained. She accepted the need to fit in with his mood, and was affectionate when he craved for affection, sensible and matter-of-fact when there were problems to discuss. She had her father's talent for gauging the temperature of an emotional situation, for knowing the correct attitude to take up. She was never at a loss. She talked in the same

manner as she made love, smoothly and responsively, with passion disciplined by intelligence, acutely responsive to every mood of her partner.

On this particular evening he waited for her impatiently. At nine o'clock he heard her usual soft knock at the door of his room. She came straight in without waiting for him to answer.

"Here you are at last!" he said with relief. "I'm so glad you've come."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. He felt the spots of rain on her coat, damp against his face. When he let her go, she took off her coat and hung it up, shaking her head to dislodge the drops of moisture.

"I could have come earlier," she said, "if I'd known. You should have telephoned."

"Yes, I should, shouldn't I. I can't think why I should expect you to know."

"Perhaps one day I shall. You'll want something and I shall know it straight away—wherever I am." She smiled. "That's silly, I suppose. But I like to feel it might happen." They sat down together on the sofa. "What sort of a day have you had?"

"Bad," said Philip. "Bad."

"What sort of bad?"

"Oh, all sorts. Busy, worrying." He said evasively: "Nothing special. Just a lot of dreariness that I don't feel like talking about at the moment. Later perhaps."

"And now?"

He put his arm round her shoulders, cupping her small breast in the palm of his hand. "Do you need to ask?"

She relaxed against him, her head on his shoulder brushing a film of moisture against his cheek. "Of course I do, I like to hear you tell me."

Softly, and at length, he told her. and as he spoke his

hands moved with his voice, finding at each step the response they craved. For the first time that day he began to feel at peace. Although at the back of his mind he knew that his peace was only temporary, yet it was there; while it lasted it was complete. There was something about the act of love which reduced all other matters to their correct proportion. It was like taking part in a great play, written long ago, a play which was about a few particular people yet at the same time showed through its study of them certain enormous and permanent truths about humanity as a whole. Like all great plays, it had an introduction, a climax, a resolution. Afterwards you collected your hat and coat and walked out into what had always before seemed a dark and forbidding street. But if the play was good enough, the street was not the same. It had lost its importance. Now you suddenly felt yourself a part of something greater, which had existed before the street was even thought of, and would still exist when street and theatre and the town itself were nothing but forgotten heaps of rubble.

Afterwards they lay for a long time without speaking, watching the fire burn low in the grate. Pamela said drowsily: "What are you thinking of?"

"You."

"A good answer. But what in particular about me?"

"I was thinking," he said slowly, "about when I first knew you. I always used to be a little intimidated. You were so smart and well-dressed and always knowing your own mind. I always wanted you, but I used to think you'd be rather a handful, more than I could cope with. But it's turned out quite differently from what I imagined. Now I often feel badly because you give way to me so much. We always seem to do what I want to do."

"That's because I usually want it too. If I didn't, I should soon let you know."

"Would you? If you could tell I wanted it terribly badly?"

She hesitated and then said: "No. Probably not, in a case like that. When you're very much in love with somebody, you can't separate your interests from theirs. It's often more important to see somebody else happy than to be happy yourself."

"Isn't that a sacrifice of independence?"

"Independence is like money," she said carelessly. "If you're born with plenty, you can afford to chuck a bit away." She sat up and brushed her hair out of her eyes. Looking down at him with a smile, she said: "Don't worry about me. I'd never let you use me as a door-mat. It would be so bad for us both." She shivered a little and began to button her blouse. "It's getting cold. I've got goose-pimples all over."

The spell was broken. Philip put more coal on the fire while Pamela dressed. He watched her, deriving pleasure from the neatness of her movements as she smoothed the creases out of her skirt, straightened her stockings, and then sat down at his dressing-table. She turned on the centre light to see better, and it was as if the increased illumination lit up all the troubles which had lain concealed in the shadows beneath his consciousness. Resolutely, he turned his face away from them. He racked his brains for something else to talk about.

Eventually he said: "Have you heard the news about Jackson?"

"Jackson?" She turned her head sharply. "No. What is it?"

"They were talking about it at lunch today. He's gone to Canada."

"Why is that?"

"It seems he couldn't find a satisfactory opening here. There was a job going in Vancouver and he took it."

"That's pretty rotten luck."

"Oh, I don't know," said Philip vaguely. "It sounded rather fun to me. In a way I envy him—going off to something quite new. The Royal is all very well—but it isn't the world."

"Just as much the world as Vancouver is, I should guess," she retorted. "And if you could get on the staff you could see a good deal of the world afterwards. Daddy's been all over the place at one time or another."

"That's not quite the same. Besides, there are openings out there. The country's expanding all the time. Here—well, you know how it is. After all, what guarantee have I got that I shall ever get on at the Royal?"

She said in surprise: "Why, you know as well as I do——" Then she stopped, looking at him with a puzzled expression. "Philip, who's been talking to you?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"There's something different about you. You seem to have lost your self-confidence."

"Oh no—I wouldn't say that. Just facing up to things."

"What things? And why so suddenly?" She persisted obstinately. "Somebody's been getting at you."

He smiled wryly. "Trying to nobble the favourite? Yes, you're quite right. It was Isherwood. He made a dead set at me this morning."

Her voice was troubled. "Isherwood?"

"Yes. Mind you, most of what he said I knew already. And I've no doubt he had his own personal reasons for saying it. But a lot of it was nevertheless true."

"What did he say?"

Philip gave her an account of the conversation. At the end he said: "Isherwood's right in this—that by the time I'm ready to be appointed to the staff, he'll be the man who counts. So that if I want to get anywhere in the long run I

should play up to him. Well, I don't propose to. Even if I was prepared to do it with my tongue in my cheek, it wouldn't work—I'm not his kind of man. These fellows like Maddox really see him as he sees himself, a sort of combination of Napoleon and Louis Pasteur. As far as I'm concerned he's all theirs. Fair enough—I'm not crying about it. But it won't help me to get a job."

"But, surely, Father——"

"Your father's a big shot now. But when I really need him he'll have been retired for three or four years. What happened to Jackson could easily happen to me."

She pondered. "I don't know. From what you say, it sounds plausible. Isherwood hates Father and anything connected with him. I suppose you realised that." She came back to the settee and sat down beside him. "Did he say anything else?"

"Yes. He mentioned the inquiry. He said he's been told that there was a conspiracy to shift the blame from me on to Mola."

"And what did you say?"

"I said it was a lie."

She was silent for a moment. Then she sighed and shook her head. "He's looking for trouble."

There was something in her tone which puzzled Philip. She had spoken as if Philip had confirmed a view previously held, as if she had knowledge of other incidents not disclosed to him.

"What do you mean?" he asked. Suddenly, suspicion came upon him. "There isn't anything in it, is there?"

"In what?"

"In what Isherwood suggested?"

She got up and warmed her hands by the fire. With her back to him, she said: "How should I know?"

"You talk as if you knew something. What did your

father tell you?" When she did not answer, he said urgently: "Look, I must know. Can't you see how important it is? This is the devil of the whole system—I'm the person it's all about and I know nothing. People put in reports, your father included, but nobody tells me what's in them. I shall go up for questioning tomorrow and I shall be completely in the dark. It's taken for granted that I haven't a mind of my own, that I shall just say what somebody tells me to say. Even you keep things from me."

She turned round to look at him. Her distress at his accusation showed plainly on her face.

"Philip, you mustn't think that! I'll tell you anything I can—always. I don't know what Father put in his report. He'd never tell me a thing like that. What I do know, and what I didn't want to tell you because I thought it might hurt you, is this: you know when you said you were the person it was all about?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm afraid that's not strictly true any more."

"I don't understand."

"Try not to get too angry," she said anxiously, "though I suppose you're bound to be annoyed. You see, it's like this. As I said, Isherwood's been sniping at Father for some time now. When this affair came up, he evidently decided it was the chance of a lifetime. He's taking the line that Father's been using his influence to cook the whole business. It's become a struggle between the two of them. If Isherwood can get enough people to believe that there's something dishonest going on, he can wreck Father's whole position. He doesn't care a damn about you or Mola."

"I see," said Philip slowly. "So the position is—correct me if I'm wrong—the position is that Mola and I don't matter any more. We're just ammunition in a private feud. Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"It was entirely Isherwood's fault."

"Oh yes—no doubt. But that doesn't really help me, does it?" He pondered for a moment. "I think I should like to speak to your father."

"He's in London."

"Yes, of course. When is he coming back?"

"Just in time for the inquiry tomorrow. They fixed the time to fit in with his train."

"Decent of them," commented Philip. "But, after all, it is *his* inquiry—reasonable enough when you come to think of it. What about ringing him tonight?"

"He'll probably be in bed. He rang me earlier on and said he was going to bed early—he'd had a hard day and didn't feel very well."

"What was wrong with him?"

"Nothing special. He's rather a hypochondriac, you know."

He nodded. "Yes, it's one of the little jokes about him. But his illnesses are always very convenient. Like Talleyrand and the Czar."

"What was that?"

"When Talleyrand heard the Czar couldn't come to a conference because he had died suddenly, he said—'I wonder what the real reason is.'"

"Father will be better tomorrow."

"I don't doubt it."

They sat in constrained silence for a few minutes. Outside, faintly, they heard the clock strike twelve.

"Time for my night round," said Philip.

Automatically she took the cue. "And I must be getting home." As she put on her coat, she said: "Don't worry too much about tomorrow, Philip. I'm sure you can trust Father to do the right thing. And he has your interests at heart, you know."



"Yes," he said softly, "believe me, I do know that."

As they walked down the stairs, he said: "There's one thing I would like to be certain about. Last Saturday—when I had dinner at your house—and your father was so nice to us—— Well, it all seemed pretty genuine to me."

"But it was."

"Yet he must have known about this business of Isherwood then. He never mentioned it."

"It was confidential."

"All right, it was confidential. All the same . . . You see, what I'm really trying to get at is that he gave his consent that night for us to get married. I thought at the time: 'This is one of the moments I'm going to remember all my life'. I wouldn't like to think that that was just a tactical manœuvre—a bribe to make me say what he wanted me to say."

She was genuinely shocked. "What a horrible idea! Philip, surely you can't believe that? You talk of him as if he were a devil."

"No," he said, "I don't think he's a devil. But I think he's held power for so long that it's made him irresponsible."

"He wouldn't do anything like that," she said with certainty. "I'm sure of it."

"Probably not," he admitted. "But that's what this life does to you—it makes you morbid. I shall end up like Crabtree if I'm not careful."

## *Chapter Fourteen*

THE TIME HAD COME. In an hour or so it would all be over, one way or another; he would be exonerated or condemned. It was something like the Fellowship, only very much

worse. In the Fellowship, failure was no disgrace, and one could live to fight another day. But an adverse verdict by the inquiry meant the end of all his hopes.

He tried to rehearse his answers to the questions they might ask. He was only too conscious of his vulnerability. However, Sir Arthur and Froy were on his side, and Sir Arthur had sounded confident. He had presumably some plan of campaign. On the other side, Philip remembered the disturbing news he had received on the previous evening. He could not contemplate with equanimity the fact that this inquiry, on which his whole life depended, was being used as a testing-ground in a struggle for power.

He had waited in this room before, just before his interview, six months ago; this time he was alone. Outside, the sky was grey and overcast. He looked disconsolately out of the window. The dark brick of the hospital was forbidding in the early twilight—even the administrative block, so white and gleaming in the architects' models, was acquiring a dingy, shop-soiled appearance, as the first layers of grime sank their claws into its virginal flesh.

The big clock face said twenty past six—he had already been waiting for nearly half an hour. Philip felt the sweat breaking out on the palms of his hands. Surely they must let him in soon? He reminded himself that they were not deliberately keeping him waiting; this was not part of a planned scheme of torture. They were, he knew only too well, men like himself, with their own worries and pre-occupations. It was absurd to regard them as soulless gorgons, glorying in his misery. They were simply not quite ready.

And yet, within him, born of his helplessness and fear, was rising a bitter resentment against all authority. These men had power over him. They could be friendly one day—and on the next they could keep him sweating and shiver-

ing in an ante-room until they were disposed to sit in judgment on him. No doubt it was unavoidable, but it was nevertheless difficult to bear. It occurred to Philip to wonder if any genuine relationship was possible under conditions of such inequality. Could one, when all was said and done, make friends with power?

"Mr. Selwood."

Philip turned round. Froy was standing in the doorway. His manner was formal, his face unsmiling, his attitude unpleasantly suggestive of a gaoler leading a prisoner from his cell.

Philip followed him into the board-room. The members of the committee of inquiry sat around the top end of the long table. Sir Oswald Pettiford, as usual, was in the chair. Next to him sat a stranger to Philip, a man with a thin, dark face and a military moustache; presumably this was Colonel Langley, the observer from the Ministry. Among the rest, Philip recognised Benson-Gray, Isherwood, and Huxtable, together with one or two other half-remembered faces. There was a single vacant chair at the opposite end of the table. The chairman motioned to him to sit down.

During the short silence while Froy tiptoed to his own seat near the chairman, Philip glanced round the table. All the members of the committee looked preternaturally solemn, and not one of them met his eyes. He had to fight to keep his head, to prevent himself feeling afraid of them. They wore their official faces like the hoods of the Ku Klux Klan, masks designed to conceal, to confuse, to terrify. These masks could not be worn by one man alone—he would simply appear pompous and ridiculous. But on an occasion such as this the effect was by no means laughable. The members of the committee appeared to Philip, in his overwrought state, to have assumed a collective existence. They had become an enormous composite Thing, without

mercy, without compassion, without a sense of humour.

The chairman leaned back and put his finger-tips together.

"Now, Mr. Selwood," he said, in the slow, sonorous voice which was so effective in the committee-room, so curiously lacking in compulsion on the hustings, "you know, of course, why we're here."

"I think so, sir."

"We have been asked by the Board of Governors to prepare a report on certain circumstances surrounding the death of a Mrs. Weston, who was admitted to this hospital on——" He consulted his notes and read out the time and date. "You attended the inquest on this patient, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the course of the inquest, the question was raised as to whether the management of this case in hospital was entirely satisfactory for one reason or another. For the sake of the good name of the hospital, it is essential that such statements, if made on evidence, should be thoroughly investigated. I think you will agree with that?"

"Certainly."

"Good. Well, of course, this isn't a court of law. Nobody's on trial for anything. We can't compel you to answer our questions. We're just here to find out the truth. If anything wrong has occurred, we want to prevent it happening again. The truth may be unpleasant for individuals, but it's to the advantage of our hospital and the medical profession, not to mention the general public. We ask you to help us in arriving at it."

"I understand," said Philip. He was growing a little impatient. "I'm prepared to tell you anything you want to know."

"I think perhaps it would be best," said Sir Oswald, "if you started by giving us your own account of what happened on the night in question."

Once again, Philip went through the details of the night's events. He wondered, as he did so, how many times he had told the story. So often, certainly, that it had begun to seem quite unreal, something that had never really happened, that he had read, perhaps, in a book. The characters who had taken part in it, himself, Mola, Greenwood, the theatre nurse, Weston, the patient herself, bore no relation to anyone who still existed. That night was isolated in a pocket of time utterly removed from present reality. It was like reciting a lesson in history.

The story was straightforward enough until he came to the end of the operation. When he reached this point, the time had come to be careful.

He said: "After I had finished the operation, I left Mr. Greenwood to see the patient back to the ward, and went to bed." He paused. "I slept until half-past four. I was then awakened by the night theatre nurse, who told me that Dr. Mola was ill. I went along to the theatre immediately. He appeared to have fainted in the surgeons' room. I called Mr. Greenwood and together we carried him to his bedroom. We stayed there for about an hour. Unfortunately I forgot to notify the night sister of my absence. When she finally got hold of me, the patient had died."

"Yes, I see." The chairman spoke as if Philip's account was much as he had expected. He made a few notes and then put down his pen. "Now, Mr. Selwood, we're going to ask you a few questions to amplify this statement of yours. But before we start I want to remind you that this is a very serious matter and that it is vital for you to tell us everything as fully and accurately as you can. I don't want you to hold anything back. It would be very wrong of you to tell us only what you think we ought to know . . ."

Sir Oswald paused for a moment to allow the full significance of his words to sink in. He paused rather too long.

It was a habit of his which in bygone days on the platform had left him fatally open to hecklers. It gave Philip an opportunity to take the initiative.

"I wouldn't dream," he said, "of concealing any facts I knew which were relevant to the matter."

Sir Oswald recoiled slightly. The accentuation of the words 'fact' and 'relevant', though slight, was not lost on him.

"Er—yes," he said. "Very proper." In a markedly less fatherly tone he continued. "Now, firstly, about this illness of Dr. Mola's. Did you form any conclusions as to its nature?"

Philip looked up at Sir Arthur. Here was the point at which help was required. This particular dilemma had lain at the heart of all his anxieties about the inquiry. How much was it right to tell about Mola? To tell everything was the safest and most cowardly way. It would distract attention from himself at the price of the betrayal of a friend and at least a partial breach of medical confidence. The other alternative was to shoulder everything himself, surely an exaggerated self-sacrifice. Sir Arthur, at their last conversation, had seemed to understand the difficulty and promise an honourable solution. The time had come for him to produce it.

"Well, Mr. Selwood?" said the chairman impatiently.

"No," said Philip.

"No?"

Sir Arthur spoke at last. "I think we're up against a snag here," he said. "Mr. Selwood naturally doesn't wish to involve Dr. Mola in any—er—trouble, and, as he inferred, I think, in a previous answer, there's a difference between opinion and fact. I can understand how he feels. Surely we can avoid placing him in this very awkward position?"

Isherwood suddenly intervened. "I can't see how," he said.

Sir Arthur hesitated for a moment. "There are—the reports . . ." he murmured reluctantly.

"Your report," said Isherwood.

"And Dr. McBain's," snapped Sir Arthur.

There was an embarrassed silence. Sir Oswald looked to one side and then the other. In these few seconds the whole position became quite clear to Philip. Sir Arthur had from the very first intended that Mola should take the blame. It was the only way of saving Philip and therefore it must be done. Since Philip was delicate about wielding the axe himself, another way had to be found. Presumably sufficient damning evidence against Mola had been put in the reports to make Philip's evidence appear hardly necessary. And if some interfering fool on the committee persisted in asking Philip questions in spite of this . . . ? Well—it was a *fait accompli*. Once somebody else had let the cat out of the bag, Philip's conscience would be clear. He could not help but confirm the story.

Sir Oswald said tentatively: "Perhaps, as you say, there's hardly any need . . ."

"I don't agree." It was a rasping, incisive voice, strange to Philip. The man from the Ministry had spoken. "My view is that we should get all possible information."

"Well—yes——" Sir Oswald blinked unhappily. He could see breakers ahead. "I take it that Colonel Langley feels the Ministry would prefer a—a——"

"A complete investigation," said Colonel Langley. He looked about him fiercely, as if inviting argument. This was the man, Philip remembered, whom Sir Arthur had written off so blithely as 'some obscure Civil Servant—all for a quiet life'!

"In that case," said the chairman, "I think we'd better

proceed." He turned his attention back to Philip. "The last question was concerning the nature of Dr. Mola's illness. You said you formed no conclusion about this?"

"I don't see," said Philip, "that my speculations about such a matter would be relevant."

"That," said the chairman severely, "is for us to decide. Do you still persist that you had no idea what was wrong with him?"

"No," said Philip desperately.

"But, as a doctor, you must have made some attempt to find out?"

"I'm not a physician."

"You didn't think of calling a physician?"

"I'm afraid I didn't."

The chairman picked up a typed document and turned to a particular page. "You say that Dr. Mola was unconscious?"

"Yes, sir."

"You at least went that far in your diagnosis?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was still unconscious when you put him to bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened after that?"

"He gradually improved and then went to sleep normally."

"Without regaining consciousness?"

"Yes."

"You had no idea what he was suffering from and yet you took no steps to call in help—why was that?"

"It didn't occur to me. He seemed to be in no danger."

"I see." The chairman decided to change his line of attack. "We'll leave that side of it for a moment. Now, I'd like you to tell me something about the condition of the patient when you first saw her."

"Before the operation," said Philip, "she was very ill."



Then, when she'd had the transfusion and the bleeding had been stopped, she was much better."

"How was she on leaving the theatre?"

"I left her in the theatre. Her pulse was a hundred and twenty, but the volume was good. Her blood pressure was only a little below normal. The blood transfusion was still running in."

"You weren't worried at this stage?"

"I wouldn't say that. But compared to her earlier condition she was satisfactory. I thought she should continue to improve, but one can never be certain."

"The operation went well, in fact. You were happy about it?"

"Yes."

"And the anæsthetic—what about that?"

"It was perfectly satisfactory."

"Do you think," said the chairman more slowly, "that the death could be in any way attributable to the anæsthetic?"

"It's impossible to say."

"Have you any opinion as to why the patient died?"

"I'm afraid not."

The chairman paused, as if pondering on some possible change of approach. As he did so, Isherwood leaned across the table.

"May I ask a question or two, Mr. Chairman?"

"Why, yes—yes, of course." There was a note of apprehension in Sir Oswald's voice as he spoke to Isherwood. Philip wondered what had passed between them in that half an hour that he had waited outside the room.

"Now, Mr. Selwood." After the chairman's essentially hollow pomposity, Isherwood's flat, nasal voice was curiously intimidating. It had a persistent, querulous note, as of a man determined to get at the truth in spite of all efforts to prevent him. "There's been a great deal of talk,"

he said, "about Dr. Mola and his indisposition that evening. To get down to facts, what duties did he carry out?"

"He gave the anæsthetic and put up a transfusion."

"Nothing else?"

"No, sir."

"And you have declared that you were quite satisfied with the anæsthetic?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the transfusion?"

"Yes."

"Did, in your opinion, Dr. Mola's illness in any way impair the performance of his duties on that evening?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Or, to put the question even more directly, can you see any way in which Dr. Mola's illness could be a relevant factor in the death of the patient?"

The chairman intervened. "That's perhaps rather an unfair way in which to put the question," he protested unhappily. "Mr. Selwood could hardly——"

"Mr. Chairman!" It was Colonel Langley again, his moustache bristling with impatience.

"Yes, Colonel Langley?"

"I think Mr. Selwood must make up his mind to face the issue. Several of his answers have seemed, to me at any rate, distinctly evasive. He can't get out of it on the ground that he's giving evidence purely on matters of fact. Quite apart from anything else, he's in the position of an expert witness. If he can give his considered medical opinion about Mrs. Weston, he can give it about Dr. Mola."

"Yes—well——" The chairman looked apologetically at Sir Arthur, as if to say that he had done all that could be expected of him. "Would you like to question Mr. Selwood yourself, Colonel Langley?"

"Thank you." The Colonel turned a pair of icy blue eyes

on Philip. "Now, young man," he said, "I don't believe in beating about the bush. This whole affair hinges on one particular point and we all know what it is. You've evidently formed the intention of expressing no opinion about it, but I don't think you can get away with that. You may or may not be aware that we have received a report in which it is implied that Dr. Mola, on the night in question, was under the influence of narcotic drugs——"

"I didn't know!" put in Philip. So his suspicions were correct. He looked at Sir Arthur, but the old man's face was hidden behind his hand. There was to be no help from that quarter.

"You know now," said Colonel Langley. "And you must realise that you can't sit on the fence any longer. As the only medical man present when Dr. Mola was found unconscious, you must give your opinion. The consequences of that opinion are our concern, not yours. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir." This was the culminating point of the nightmare, the appalling moment. Always one believed that it would never go so far as this; one would wake up and find that it had never really happened. He was hopelessly trapped. He could only save Mola by letting down Sir Arthur before the committee of inquiry. The alternative was to support the allegations, to let Mola take his chance. He could save his own career; Mola would be gone next day, the whole incident soon forgotten.

The arguments fought their way through Philip's mind, leaving at the end a confusion greater than before. He heard Colonel Langley's voice, as if from a great distance.

"Have you, or have you not, any reason for believing that Dr. Mola was under the influence of drugs?"

It was suddenly quite simple. The arguments were irrelevant, the evidence, the obligations, the right and the

wrong. A scene flashed through Philip's mind. Once in his student days he had been told to carry out an experiment on a live frog. It was necessary to take a long needle and push it down the frog's spinal column. Philip had looked at the needle and then at the frog—he had known then that if it had meant the abandonment of his whole medical course he could not do this thing. In the end he had bribed the laboratory attendant to do it for him.

Today there was no such easy way out. He said, slowly and definitely: "None, sir."

"I see," said the Colonel seriously. Then, as casually as he had assumed command of the inquiry, he relinquished it again. "That appears to dispose of our main difficulty, Mr. Chairman."

The chairman nodded. He seemed at a loss for something to say. Then he glanced furtively at Benson-Gray and said: "Would you like to ask any questions, Sir Arthur?"

Sir Arthur lifted his head. He paused for a moment like an expert bridge player weighing the possibilities of a hand. His face was grey and lifeless, the eyelids drooped. Philip remembered uneasily what Pamela had said the night before. . . . Could it be that he was really ill—that he had made a long train journey in spite of it, especially to attend the meeting?

Philip had a sudden terror that Sir Arthur would look at him, like Banquo's ghost, and make some bitter accusation of ingratitude or treachery. But the old man shook his head languidly.

"No questions," he said.

"Anybody else?" asked the chairman. "No? Then that, I think, is just about all, Mr. Selwood——"

"Excuse me, sir, but may I say something?"

"Well—I'm not sure that it would be in order. As a witness——"

"I'm sure," said Colonel Langley, taking charge again, "that if Mr. Selwood has something important to say, none of us will object."

"Thank you, sir." Philip took a deep breath. There was no object in dragging out the ordeal. The damage was done—he might as well finish the whole affair once and for all. "I wish to say that I'm deeply sorry for what happened on that night and I feel that I, and I alone, should take responsibility for what went wrong. I don't say that I was to blame for the patient's death. I don't know why she died, and neither, so far as I can see, does anyone else. But I admit that I was not available when I should have been, and if prompt medical attention was not available it was my fault." In a lower voice, he went on: "It's clear to me that the result of this inquiry will be to censure me very severely for my carelessness. Under such circumstances my presence can only be an embarrassment to the hospital. I should like to offer my resignation."

There was a short silence. The chairman looked around at the members of the committee. None of them made any comment.

"Very well, Mr. Selwood," Sir Oswald said. "I don't think the committee will need you any further. You will be notified in due course about the result of the inquiry. As regards your resignation—if you care to put it in writing, that also will be considered."

Philip stood up. "Thank you, sir."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Selwood."

"Good afternoon, sir."

Philip went out of the board-room and closed the door behind him. As he walked down the corridor he saw the clock again through a window. He noticed with surprise that he had been no more than half an hour in front of the committee. He lit a cigarette to calm his nerves, and tried

to discover how he felt, without much success. Too much had happened in too short a time. He was like a general fighting a battle on a fluid front, forced to take major decisions without a full analysis of the facts. In due course, when the smoke had cleared, he might be able to understand the significance of what he had done. Though perhaps not fully, even then. . . .

At least he could make a provisional count of his losses. His job at the Royal, his future in surgery, his friendship with Sir Arthur—those would do for the present. He had traded them for his self-respect, and he was not ashamed. A promise was a promise.

He was sorry for Sir Arthur, but he reminded himself that the old man had only himself to blame. He had resorted to a shabby trick. There had, in fact, been too many tricks all along, too much intrigue, too many mean and petty motives. He had submitted to the training and the discipline gladly, because it had led to the sense of being part of an organisation greater and better than himself. But now he wondered. This ignoble squabbling and backbiting in committee-rooms was something he had never taken into account.

As Philip walked slowly up the staircase he found himself face to face with the bust of Roderick. He looked at it for a moment and then passed sadly on his way. Even those haughty, aristocratic features had lost their magic.



## **Part III**





## Chapter One

PAMELA WAS WAITING FOR HIM in his room. As he entered, she rose and came towards him. Her face was anxious.

"What happened?" she asked. "How did it go?"

Her anxiety deepened. From his attitude it was obvious that things had not gone well.

He sat down and lit a cigarette. His hand trembled as he held the match.

"I've resigned," he said.

"Resigned? Why?"

He looked away from her. It was not going to be easy to explain. "The more we talked, the more obvious it became to me that it was the only decent and dignified thing to do."

"You mean they threw all the blame on to you?"

"There was no question of putting the blame on to me. It was always there—I couldn't escape it. All the inquiry did was to put it into words——"

She looked puzzled. "But from what Father said——"

He retorted angrily: "I'm tired of what your father said. He's made a hash of everything. If only he'd allowed events to take their course, this wouldn't have happened. The trouble is that he's rigged and gerrymandered things in this hospital for so long that it's become a habit with him." His anger subsided. It was mainly due, he realised, to a bad conscience. "Oh, I know that sounds ungrateful. I know you'll say he was only doing it for me——"

"Doing what?"

"I don't know the details, but it isn't too difficult to guess. I gathered that in his report he made a lot of Mola and the drugs, and tried to give the impression that the woman had

died because of the anæsthetic. I was supposed to agree, at least by inference. Well—I wouldn't."

"And that made him into a liar before the committee?"

"Yes," he said miserably. "I'm afraid it did."

For a while she sat in silence. Then, she said: "Philip."

"Yes?"

"Before I say anything else, I want you to tell me something. And promise me the truth."

"All right. I promise."

"Why do you think that woman died?"

"Oh God," he cried, "if you knew how sick I am of that question! I tell you I don't know. The post-mortem was negative. It was just one of those things——"

"I didn't ask you what you knew," she persisted. "I asked you what you thought."

"But what I think doesn't mean anything at all!" He got up and paced up and down the room in his agitation. "You have to have evidence. You can't go shooting off guesses at a committee of inquiry——"

"This isn't a committee of inquiry. This is just the two of us. I have a right to know what you think."

Suddenly he felt dreadfully tired. Tired of talking, of thinking, of fighting. They might as well have it all, he thought. And with this thought came the sickening realisation that 'they' now included Pamela, that he was beginning to regard her as one of the enemy.

"I think she probably died because of the anæsthetic," he said wearily. "There wasn't really anything else."

"Could it have happened just as it did, due to a mistake in the anæsthetic?"

"Yes. He could have given too much relaxant."

"Did you ask him if he had?"

"Of course not. He probably wouldn't know himself, anyway." Seeing the expression on Pamela's face he said

desperately: "I know what you're thinking. But you must make an effort to understand. There was no evidence that Mola killed that woman—none at all. It's nothing but guess-work. I still contend that there's no real proof that Mola was responsible. Even if he was, I am still at fault for not being there when I was called. Your father knew how I felt, but he thought he could manoeuvre me into a position where I would do as he wanted."

"As *he* wanted!" she said, stung into bitter indignation. "It wasn't anything to him. He was doing it for you."

"Among other things. There was my career, and your happiness, and his own pride. . . ." He said, almost to himself: "Old men can be very frivolous."

"You call that frivolous!"

"Yes. Comparatively speaking, those things aren't important."

"Then what is so important? Are you thinking of the woman?"

"No. Nothing that happens now can make any difference to her."

"Then who? Mola, I suppose."

"He's entitled to justice," said Philip weakly.

"If he had justice," she replied acidly, "he'd be in gaol now."

"Yes, that's true." He ran his hands through his hair. He was conscious of making a poor showing. He had not lost faith in his point of view, but he found it difficult to formulate even to himself, much less explain to another. "You must think I'm a complete fool," he said. "This is the sort of behaviour I should have had nothing but contempt for a month or two ago. I don't admire myself now, I can assure you. But I must try to explain." He pondered for a moment, trying to hit on some salient fact, some starting-point. "I think it all really began with something you said."

"That I said? Whatever do you mean?"

"When you said—do you remember?—that it wasn't just a question of Mola and me any more, that the trouble between your father and Isherwood was the main issue. That was a shock to me——"

"To your vanity?"

"No, it was more than that. I honestly felt there was something dreadfully wrong about it, quite apart from myself. If this had been the only incident, it would have been bad enough. But as I thought about it, it began to come to me that the same sort of thing had been happening ever since the first moment I came to the Royal—and even before, for that matter." His agitation rose as the instances crowded into his mind. "Why was Jackson forced to leave? Because I passed my Fellowship. Why was I appointed in his place? Because I was going to marry you. Why was Mola appointed? Because there had been a disagreement about the other candidates. And so it went on afterwards. Hardly ever were steps taken because they were for the best. Always it was because one person liked another or hated another, or saw an advantage or didn't want to offend. Sometimes it even came into the treatment of cases—a man would hang on to a case he was beaten with rather than ask the advice of a colleague he didn't like. That's what I mean by frivolous. And so it was going to be with this affair. I was to be whitewashed. Mola was to carry the can. Not because it was right—they didn't know or care whether it was right or not—but because it was convenient and economical. And no one bothered to think what might happen to Mola—that he might get struck off the register and ruined, even sent to prison if the worst came to the worst."

"No one except Isherwood," said Pamela ironically. "He cared."

"Isherwood didn't give a damn about Mola—I know that. That's what made it so much worse. God knows I didn't want to support Isherwood against your father. But when it came to the point, there was one fact which emerged: I just couldn't sit there and let them throw Mola to the wolves. It wasn't a question of logic, or conflicting loyalties, or principles or anything. It was purely instinctive. I just couldn't do it."

"Well," she said bitterly, "that closes the case, doesn't it? There's no more to be said. You can't argue against instinct. What happens now?"

"I don't know. I haven't had time to think. It's going to be pretty unpleasant for all of us, I'm afraid. I don't see your father forgiving me for this in a hurry."

"Was he very upset?"

"Yes. At one point, I think he'd gladly have strangled me. I don't know what he had said beforehand, but it was obvious that my evidence landed him thoroughly in the cart."

She said nothing. She was standing with her back to him, looking down at the fireplace; though he could not see her face he noticed something unusual in her attitude. Coming towards her, he saw she was crying, silently. Her hand gripped the mantelpiece in an effort to keep herself under control.

"Pamela—darling—please——" He tried to put his arm round her shoulders, but she moved away.

"No. Not now. You'll only make me worse," she said painfully. "But you can lend me a handkerchief, if you don't mind."

He gave her a handkerchief and she wiped her eyes. "Sorry. I didn't mean to do that. Quite without warning—I came over all sloppy and feminine." She made an attempt to smile. "I shall be better now. It was just the shock—

everything was so good and it's all changed so quickly." She almost broke down again, recovered herself and said quickly: "When will you be leaving the hospital?"

"Tomorrow, I expect. Technically I should give a month's notice, but that's neither here nor there. I couldn't possibly work with your father any more."

"And after that?"

"God knows."

"You'll go for another job?"

"I don't know. You see," he said, "I have to face the fact that I'm pretty well washed up in surgery as far as this country's concerned. That's no exaggeration—it applies to about fifty per cent of the chaps who are training. With your father behind me, I had a chance—not a certainty, mind you, but a fair chance. Without your father, I'm odds against. Without your father and with a dirty mark against me on account of this affair, I'm the rankest of outsiders. My only chance is to cut my losses and go abroad."

"Where?"

"I should have to go into it. Canada and Australia are the two likeliest places. I might write to Jackson."

She said: "And what about me? Do I come into this at all?"

"Why, of course. Naturally," he said, "I don't know on the spur of the moment what would be the best way. Either we could get married first, and go over together. Or I could go first and you could join me later. . . ."

She made the flat statement: "You know I can't go."

"Why not?" he asked aggressively.

"Oh—because of Father. You don't suppose I could leave him at a time like this, do you?"

"Listen, Pamela, you don't belong to him! He has no right——"

"It's not a question of right." Savagely she repeated his

own words. "It's purely instinctive. I just couldn't do it."

"When I said that I meant it."

"And so do I." The aggressiveness left her. She said: "He hasn't anyone but me. He's rich and successful and respected, so you think he's secure, but he's not. You don't know him. I don't blame you for that. He doesn't want anyone to know him. This affair may finish him completely. Whether it does or not, he'll need me more than he's ever done before. How do you suppose he'd feel if I left him now—and to go with you?"

Philip repeated stubbornly: "I shall have to go."

They were both silent. Philip thought sadly that all this was none of their doing. They had not thrown away the gift of happiness. They had valued and treasured it, always conscious of its beauty and of its enormous fragility. Their care had been unavailing. They were beaten by a force against which there was no defence. The unthinkable, the thing which could not be done, could not even be considered, lay between them.

In a last effort, she said: "Do you love me, Philip?"

"You know I do."

She shook her head. "It's not so certain as that. You might easily not—particularly at the moment."

"I love you," he said.

"But you could do without me." She argued as much with herself as with him. "If I can't go with you, you'll go alone, won't you?"

"Yes," he said after a pause. "I should manage without you, because I should have to. I shouldn't fall into a decline, or commit suicide, or join the Foreign Legion—life isn't like that. I should work hard and try to forget you, and perhaps marry somebody else. And you would do the same. But what does that mean? Simply that we're human animals, that we're young and still have some fight



left in us. If we can't have the best, we'll have second best. But that doesn't make it any the less of a tragedy—that we once had the best within our hands and threw it away.”

“If we did it this way,” she said with certainty, “it wouldn't be the best any more.”

“That's sentimentality. Your father's an old man. Pity——”

“But it isn't just pity. I have my own sense of honour to consider—without that I'm of no use to myself or to anyone else. And there's another thing that you keep forgetting. You have it in your mind always that Father was in the wrong, that he only had himself to blame. In spite of what you say, you think you did something rather big. But I don't agree. I think you did something small, to pay him out for hurting your pride.”

“If that's the case,” said Philip, “I paid myself out pretty effectively too. I chucked away my own career.”

Pamela was unabashed. She regarded him judicially. “You always come back to that—as if it was the one proof you had that your motives were above suspicion.”

“I should have thought it was enough,” he retorted.

“I'm not so sure. I sometimes wonder how much you really care about your career. You were never dependent on it like the others. Oh,” she said impatiently, as if to forestall an irrelevant objection, “I don't mean financially. But in some much more fundamental way it doesn't matter to you like it does to the others. I've begun to feel sure of that. I first noticed it that day when you took the Fellowship—when you sat there waiting for the results. I could see you despising the others, in their blue suits and white stiff collars, because they cared so dreadfully. To you it was undignified—it was ridiculous. And now, behind all your crocodile tears, there's something inside you that's glad——” she forced the question remorselessly “—isn't there?”

He did not reply at once. But his very silence was a good enough answer. He recognised at once the truth of her accusation, and was surprised not to find himself more upset by this exposure of his own self-deception. He looked at her in wonder and gratitude.

"I believe you really must love me," he said. "You've watched me so closely."

"Am I right?" she persisted.

"Quite right—now you bring it to my attention. Does it make you very disappointed in me?"

"Of course not," she said, as if to a child who required explanation of even the simplest things. "It's you, isn't it? It's part of you, and so I wouldn't want to change it. Just like what you've done today. I wish—oh, so dreadfully—that you hadn't done it. But once it's done, it becomes part of the picture—not a very good part, but necessary to make the whole. And it's the whole that I love."

Philip made a hopeless gesture with his hands. He seemed to be finding out so much, so quickly, and yet—to what advantage? It was all purely academic. Nothing could be done. Only now did he feel that he was really beginning to know her, in the moment of irrevocable loss.

"But you won't come with me?" he said. It was as much a statement as a question.

"No."

Wearily she picked up her coat and threw it over her shoulders. He said: "Pamela—darling——"

"There isn't anything else to say—positively nothing," she said. "Let's try not to say it. Then we can keep our self-respect."

As she picked up her bag, she said: "Oh yes, there is just one more item . . ." She took a little box out of her bag. It was the one which contained the ring he had bought her. She had never worn it in public. Today, he remem-

bered, was to have been the first time. She put it hastily on the mantelpiece.

"No," he cried painfully. "Please keep the ring."

"I'd rather not." Her voice was artificially sharp and brisk with the necessity of controlling herself. "Philip, please don't embarrass me. It's like arguing about who should pay the bill."

She went to the door. Before leaving, she said, in a bright, dutiful voice, like a nice little girl thanking her hostess after a party: "I hope you'll like Canada. And make a success. I feel sure you will."

He smiled wryly. "I can't think why."

"In spite of everything, there's an air of success about you—it can't be denied. You don't need to worry." Suddenly the whole edifice seemed to collapse. She sobbed: "Kiss me once —just once before I go."

He took her in his arms and she pressed her face against his shoulder. She was crying now, without restraint. As he touched her cheek it was damp to his hand and he was reminded of the previous night—it seemed an age ago. Then it had been the rain.

Suddenly, she made an effort, shook herself free of his embrace, and without another word walked rapidly away into the darkness of the corridor.

## *Chapter Two*

THE NEXT MORNING Philip drafted his resignation and took it along to the secretary's office. Froy was ready to see him almost immediately.

"Good-morning, Selwood." It was the curt, business-like voice Froy used for his inferiors.

"Good-morning." Philip pushed the envelope across the

vast walnut desk. "I thought I might as well hand you my resignation in person."

Froy grunted, opened the envelope and read the contents carefully. Philip, who knew sufficient of Froy's manners to guess that he would wait a long time before being asked to take a seat, drew up a chair and made himself comfortable.

Froy finished reading. "Right," he said. "I'll transmit this to the Board."

"That's just a pure formality, of course?"

"Yes—you can take it as such." Froy folded the paper carefully and slipped it into a cardboard file. "When did you want to leave?"

"Immediately."

"You know that you're supposed to give a month's notice?"

"Yes. But I think you'll agree with me that the circumstances are unusual."

"Maybe," conceded Froy, "maybe. I don't suppose we can stop you, if you insist on going. But you understand, don't you, that in these circumstances we can only pay your salary up to the day you leave——"

"Naturally." Philip found it difficult to conceal his disgust. It was Froy's gift to spring, immediately and without effort, to the most squalid aspect of any given situation. "That's quite understood. I can see that it will mean some inconvenience to you if I leave so soon, and I'm sorry. But I think it will be better for everyone this way."

"I suppose you mean Benson-Gray," said Froy. "It might be a bit embarrassing?"

"It would be intolerable for both Sir Arthur and myself. You must see that."

"The possibility had occurred to me," said Froy dryly. "So your idea is to pack up today?"

"Yes."

Froy half-closed his eyes and gave a long, wheezy cough. "On the whole," he said afterwards, "I'm inclined to agree with you. I'll tell the chairman what your reasons are. I don't think he'll be very surprised. Crabtree and Maddox can split your work between them for a few weeks. They won't like it," he observed with some satisfaction, "but it won't hurt either of them to get up in the night once in a while. I'll arrange with the finance officer to make out your salary cheque."

"Thank you." Philip made no sign of leaving. Nor did Froy appear to expect him to go. They sat there for a moment, regarding each other with what appeared to be similar emotions—a mutual curiosity blended with dislike. Finally Philip said: "I suppose there's no use asking you the result of the meeting?"

"No," said Froy bluntly. "In any case, it's not finished."

"Not finished?"

"The chairman adjourned it till six o'clock today."

"Why?"

Froy pursed his lips. Within him, discretion struggled with a desire to impart momentous news. It was the first time Philip had ever noticed signs of internal conflict in him—it made the man seem suddenly human. And, for once, prudence was discarded.

"Because it was getting a bit too hot for him," he said confidentially, "that's why. There were some pretty unpleasant things said, I can tell you. So he decided to give them twenty-four hours to cool off."

"Oh." Philip felt a slight sensation of nausea. It came home to him that, in spite of his determination to anticipate the worst, there was still some proportion of the possible disaster left undiscounted. He must have held somewhere, tucked out of sight, a hope that the storm might blow over, leaving no one damaged but himself.

"Did Mola give evidence?" he asked.

"He wasn't called. It was finally decided that he shouldn't be." A reminiscent gleam came into Froy's beady eyes. "That was what most of the argument was about."

"So he's out of it?" said Philip.

"Yes. He can move off today, too—as soon as he likes. I believe arrangements have been made for his—disposal?"

"Yes, they have."

Froy made an offhand gesture. "I don't know or care anything about that. It's a medical matter. I have plenty of troubles of my own without worrying about medical matters. But as an administrator I give you my opinion that the sooner he's out of the way, the better." He said in an aggrieved voice: "There's some damned woman who keeps ringing up my office——"

"Elizabeth," said Philip involuntarily.

"I don't know what her Christian name is. She keeps going on about an inheritance he's swindled her out of." Froy shrugged his shoulders. "From the stories I hear of him, it may well be true. But what the blazes she expects *me* to do about it——"

"I don't think you'll be worried much more," said Philip. "Everything's fixed up. He's agreed to go into Fartown Manor. I'm taking him over there myself this afternoon."

Froy nodded approval. "Fine. Fine. That's a load off my mind."

"You're going to be very short of staff—no surgical registrar, no anaesthetist."

"Oh, we'll get over that," said Froy confidently, cheerful in the knowledge that he himself could not be involved in any extra work. "Everyone will just have to pull together and do a bit more. These are secondary considerations. The main thing to avoid, under this Health Service, is trouble." By a delicate use of emphasis he supplied the

word 'trouble' with inverted commas. "Lawsuits, inquiries, inquests, letters to the newspapers, questions in the House—that sort of thing. It may start off by concerning only one particular person, but by the time various people have had their say the affair becomes so damnably complicated that the Ministry gets sick of trying to sort it all out, and gives everybody a kick in the pants, regardless of who's really to blame. I'd rather run a hospital half-staffed than have trouble." He said feelingly: "We've had enough trouble this month to last us a year—and it hasn't finished yet. There's going to be all hell let loose this afternoon."

"Again?"

Froy nodded. "Between ourselves, Sir Arthur went a great deal too far in that report of his. I thought so at the time. I told him that you had only to refuse to back him up and he was dished—but he was so sure of you that he wouldn't listen."

"He took too much for granted," said Philip defensively.

"Exactly." In Froy's voice there was neither praise nor censure. To him, the matter was of interest only as a problem in tactics. "Mind you," he went on, as if anxious to be fair to Benson-Gray, "it was unlike him. He doesn't usually make mistakes of that sort. I've always regarded him as a first-class committee man, very cautious in what he said." Froy concluded, with the air of one regretfully compelled to face unpleasant realities: "But then, one has to remember, he's not as young as he was. . . ."

As he passed the porter's office on his way back from the administrative block, Philip was handed a message; Sir Arthur had telephoned to say that he would not be coming into the hospital. This left the day relatively free. Philip dismissed the students and stood irresolutely in the hall. There was so much to be done that it was difficult to know

where to start. Then he saw Crabtree, as shabby, hunched and preoccupied as ever, coming towards him along the corridor.

This, he thought, was as good a place to start as any. Moreover, it was tidy and appropriate. Crabtree had introduced him to the Royal; Crabtree should, as it were, see him off.

"Hello," he said.

"Oh, hello." Crabtree showed no pleasure at the meeting. It was not his practice. In his world the worst was always anticipated. Every new event was regarded with misgiving, every encounter was the possible precursor of bad news.

"Have you a moment to spare?" asked Philip politely.

"Yes—I suppose so. I was just popping out to the shops——"

"For some cigarettes?" said Philip with gentle irony. "You really ought to try buying more than ten at a time."

"It seems so expensive if you do," said Crabtree plaintively. He was the type of person who is congenitally incapable of buying anything in bulk. Even stamps were purchased singly—a five-shilling book would have appeared to him as a monstrous extravagance.

"Have one of mine," suggested Philip, offering his case.

"I owe you a lot already," Crabtree reminded him.

"Never mind. This is the last I shall be able to offer you, I'm afraid. I'm leaving today."

"Leaving?" said Crabtree in surprise. Then astonishment was succeeded by envy. "Have you got a better job?"

"No." Philip saw the relief in the other's face. It was nice to be able to give this crumb of consolation. "In fact, I haven't got a job at all."

"Then what's happened? Have they sacked you?"

His tactlessness was so naïve as to be lacking in offence.



Philip said, as calmly as possible: "No, I resigned. Surely you must have guessed it was on the cards."

"Oh, I see. Over that business of the anæsthetic death." Comprehension came to Crabtree. He was in the picture at last. "Did they ask you to resign?"

"No."

Crabtree looked as if he found this hard to believe. Independent action on the part of a person so junior as Philip or himself did not enter into his scheme of possibilities.

"It's quite true," said Philip, rather impatiently.

"Well—I dunno." Crabtree shook his head in perplexity. He regarded Philip with disapproval and a certain awe. Here was indeed a wild man; one who, if rumours were anything to go by, had been bold enough to engage in the most intimate relations with the professor's daughter. Of such a person almost anything might be believed. But he felt it necessary to draw Philip's attention to the seriousness of his step. "They won't give you much of a testimonial," he said.

"I don't propose to ask anyone for a testimonial," said Philip shortly. The very word was repellent to him. It was a badge of dependence, of servitude—a Crabtree word. Crabtree would go through his life talking of pensions and security, being respectful to those in authority, paying heavy insurances to protect himself against sickness and destitution, and investing whatever money he had to spare in sound gilt-edged stock at three and a half per cent. That was certain. And what was almost as certain was that his stock would depreciate, his pension be whittled down to a minimum, and his devotion repaid with contempt. 'They'—the masters, the holders of power, the leaders of the pack who controlled all entry into its coveted ranks—had no love for weakness. Crabtree would fail. He, Philip, had also

failed . . . and rightly. He had failed because the pack demanded discipline as well as spirit, and—even more important—it demanded that its interests should take precedence over all others. None of them would ever trust him again, not even Isherwood, whose vague bribes would almost certainly be withdrawn now that they had served their purpose. He had flown in the face of authority and that was enough. The details were not significant.

They stood together, two failures—but no spark of fellow-feeling passed between them. Crabtree said finally: “Who’s going to do your work?”

“You and Maddox, for the moment.”

“I thought as much,” said Crabtree lugubriously. “That’s what always happens. With no thanks from anybody. This is a mug’s game. And nothing much at the end of it, so far as I can see.” He looked with regret at his soggy tab-end before throwing it away. For a moment only, his sluggish mind toyed with the idea of rebellion. “I suppose it’s bloody cold out in Canada.”

“I believe so.”

“I almost envy you—packing it up. I ought to do the same myself.”

“Nothing’s stopping you,” Philip pointed out.

Crabtree breathed deeply in and out, his brows wrinkled. “I dunno,” he said. “Perhaps I’ll give it another year.”

Philip left him and made his way up to the wards. He had to fight back a wave of depression which swelled up within him. That, he thought bitterly, was the worst of Crabtree. The man was grotesque, and while he was still there in front of you it was possible to laugh at the atmosphere of gloom he carried around with him. Afterwards, however, something always remained, a vague flattening of the spirits, a sense of malaise, as if you had just eaten something which might presently make you sick. It was a relief

to meet Greenwood, who, on being told of the news, said: "I'm sorry," but with only regret, no sympathy. It plainly did not enter his head that resignation could have any serious consequences for Philip. To him, a man of Philip's age, with a Fellowship and a certain degree of private income, was for all practical purposes invulnerable. Philip was grateful for this encouragement. In the days to come he was going to need all the self-confidence he could muster.

By lunch-time the necessary arrangements had been made. He had told as few people as possible of his departure. He did not wish to be embarrassed by the necessity of explanations and good-byes. They could get it all from Greenwood second-hand the next morning. He did not even go in to lunch, for fear the news might have broken. Instead, he packed his few belongings, piled them in the back of the car, and drove home.

## *Chapter Three*

AT THE HOUSE Bella was expecting him. Everything had been dusted and swept for his arrival, the furniture gleaming with polish, the silver on the sideboard newly cleaned. As always, she made a great fuss of him. She must be lonely, he thought. There was not enough work to keep her busy, and he spent very little time at home. A comfortable life for her, but a solitary one—no doubt she was desperately bored at times.

He had not told her why he was leaving, and fortunately she had not asked him. On the other hand, she must be wondering . . . her future was dependent on his. Some arrangement would have to be made. Perhaps she had another job in mind; she would certainly have no difficulty

in finding a place. But he did not want to discuss it with her today.

She helped him with his luggage and said: "There's a nice fire in the drawing-room."

"Thank you, Bella. I'll just sit and read for a while, I think."

"That's right. I'll bring your tea in at four o'clock."

She went off into the kitchen. Philip settled himself into the deep leather arm-chair which had always been the special property of his father while he had lived. He read for ten minutes or so. Then the warmth from the fire and his own fatigue were too much for him. The book dropped from his hand and he fell asleep.

He awakened with a start and looked at his watch. It was after six—he must have been asleep for over two hours. He felt dry-mouthed, crumpled, and out of sorts. He came stiffly to his feet, yawned, turned on the light and straightened his tie in front of the mirror.

Bella, who must have been listening for his first movement, came in from the kitchen.

"Have you had a good sleep?" she asked solicitously.

"I seem to have done. I must be getting old," he said, with some resentment at his own weakness, "dropping off in a chair."

"I expect you haven't had long enough in bed. I thought you looked tired when you came in. And with the worry and all."

"Yes, that's probably it. But I can't say I feel much better for my sleep."

"You will later," she said with confidence. "Shall I make you a cup of tea?"

"I haven't time, I'm afraid." He saw the disappointment on her face. She had waited in lonely silence all the after-

noon, anticipating a comfortable chat over the tea-cups as her reward. He added apologetically: "I have an appointment at half-past six."

"What about your dinner?"

"I'll come back for that afterwards. I don't know what time it will be. It depends how long this job takes."

"Job?"

"Yes. It's really the last thing I have to clear up at the hospital. I shan't be any longer than I have to, I can assure you."

"Righto," she said, with determined cheerfulness. "Expect you when I see you, shall I?"

"That's about it."

He drove down to the hospital in the early twilight. Usually at this time the car park was almost deserted but tonight it was half-full, the sign of a Board meeting. Philip saw the back of Sir Arthur's old-fashioned Rolls and remembered. Of course, the inquiry was to be resumed this evening. They were probably already in there, taking up the argument at the stage it had been left off. Philip noted this fact without any feeling that he was personally concerned. From his point of view the inquiry was finished, just as the Royal was finished, so that he now entered the front door as if it were quite a strange place, and half-expected the porter, instead of acknowledging him, to ask him what was his business.

As he went up to Mola's room he was overcome with distaste for his task. He had not awakened in a very good mood and with each step he became more disgruntled. The truth was that he was tired of Mola, just as he was tired of Crabtree, and Maddox, and Isherwood—in fact, of the Royal as a whole and everything connected with it. The only person, ironically enough, for whom he retained any interest or affection was the one to whom his very name

must now be anathema—Sir Arthur Benson-Gray. For all his faults, his vanity, his lack of honesty, his indifference to the interests of those not of his own party, there was a fundamental warmth about the old man which made Philip bitterly unhappy to have lost his friendship. He could not find it in his heart to blame Pamela for her decision to stick to her father.

And now there was this last duty to perform towards Mola. The trouble with Mola, Philip reflected, was that he was not adequate to the part he had been called upon to play. He was too shifty and irresolute—he lacked heroic proportions.

He was, in fact, as Pamela had pointed out some time ago, a natural underdog, haunted always by the consciousness of his own inadequacy. Like so many people who appear always to be fighting a rearguard action against life, he could never be entirely trusted. The struggle for survival had left him an insufficient margin for generosity.

He was waiting for Philip in his room. He sat disconsolately in the solitary wicker arm-chair, his shoulders hunched, his eyes heavy. His bags were packed and the rest of his belongings piled in a heap on the bed. There seemed to be a great many of them. An old tennis racket, a portable gramophone, a carrier bag full of framed photographs, a brass toasting-fork, a pair of book-ends . . . rubbish, which would have done well to go for thirty shillings in a job-lot at a junk sale. This was Mola's home, carried about with him from one chill, inhospitable lodging to another. And now to the last, the final degradation. Once more, Philip felt pity rising within him. He struggled against it. It was like water flooding into the holds of a ship, weighing down the buoyancy of his resolution. He said brusquely: "Are you ready?"

"Yes. I am quite ready." Yet Mola did not move. Some

power seemed to prevent him getting out of the chair. It was as if he felt that up to this moment there was a possibility of turning back.

More gently, Philip said: "Come along. We shall have to go."

Mola nodded. He made a final effort and stood on his feet. Then he looked around in a dazed fashion, incapable of deciding what to do next. Philip picked up the telephone and rang for the porter.

They carried the light luggage between them, and the porter brought the rest. With some difficulty it was fitted into the car. As Philip prepared to drive off he noticed that the porter had not left them. He was still standing there, with an aggrieved look on his face. Mola was slumped on the front seat, his hat over his eyes, oblivious to everything but his own misery. With a spasm of irritation Philip got out of the car and fumbled in his pockets. He had no change. Impatiently he handed the man a ten-shilling note and got back into the car.

As they drove away, Mola said: "I am sorry. I forgot to tip him."

"It ~~does~~esn't matter."

"Oh yes it does," he said urgently. The social conventions were something to hang on to, a sign that you were still accepted as a member of the sane world. "I must pay you back."

"Some other time," said Philip.

"No. No, please." Mola fumbled in his wallet. "How much did you give him?"

Philip was about to protest again. Then, just in time, he realised that refusal would be an unbearable insult. "Ten bob," he said.

Mola passed over a note and Philip crammed it into his overcoat pocket. The car moved on through the suburbs

and out into the country. It was almost dark and he turned on the headlights. They had twenty miles to go. He had travelled over most of the road before, yet now, for the first time, the leafy, winding lanes took on a ghostly appearance, as if the consciousness of their destination cast some sinister influence over them. A slight drizzle came on, covering the windows, except for the two triangles of windscreen cleared by the wipers, with an opaque film, and driving the two men further into a state of isolation. Mola was immobile, his face in shadow. Philip, though determined, in self-protection, on an attitude of detachment, could not help trying to imagine how he would feel in Mola's position.

It was difficult to envisage comparable circumstances. When, he wondered, had he been most unhappy in his life? His mind went back to his years in the Army. He had been afraid sometimes, very much afraid, but that was nothing; fear always came to an end, one way or another. More than that, there was comradeship—one was not alone. No—for true despair one had to go back further, to the days of his adolescence. There was a day, fifteen years ago, when he had driven along a road similar to this, a very small boy in the back of a very large car. Each turn of the engine, each beat of the pistons, carried him one step further towards a new and terrifying world. Could it be, thought Philip—and the terror of that day was still so vivid in his memory that there seemed nothing absurd in the comparison—could it be that for Mola it was like the day when one first went away to school, only much worse?

He tried to recall the details of that earlier occasion, but found he could not. Nothing was left but the memory of a dreadful sense of emptiness, of being utterly bewildered and forlorn. His mother had sat with him in the back of the car and tried to divert him with conversation. Had he been grateful for that? He could not remember. It may well, for



all he knew, have made things harder by reminding him that in only a few hours he would be cut off from such consolations. But at least she had tried, and by trying had given him something of incalculable value to enrich and fortify the rest of his life—a memory that in his hour of greatest trial somebody had spoken to him with the voice of love Mola had nobody. And if the voice of love was lacking, surely there could be friendship, compassion . . . It was not enough. But it was better than nothing.

He said, conscious of the feebleness of his words: "Don't get too depressed about this. They tell me it's a first-rate place of its kind . . ."

Mola said, almost in a whisper: "Of its kind . . ."

"I don't suppose you'll be there long."

"You think not?" The question was ironical.

"No."

Mola sighed deeply. Then in a low voice he said: "All my life."

"Oh, what nonsense!"

Mola shook his head. "When we were in the prison camp," he said, "we did not know how long it would be. But we knew that if we *were* freed, it was the end. We did not deserve to be in prison, you see—and so we retained our self-respect. If we had been guilty of crimes, it would have been different. You cannot hand a man's self-respect back to him with his suit of clothes when he leaves the prison." He paused, as if determined to express accurately a conception to which he had given a good deal of thought. "So it is with sanity. A man goes through life with the idea that he is on the whole sane, just as he believes that he is on the whole good. If society can persuade him, no matter for how short a time, that he is wicked—or mad—he will never feel quite the same as long as he lives. He has lost confidence."

"Nobody is trying to persuade you that you're mad."

"There is something wrong with me," said Mola, "otherwise I would not be going to this place. I do not know precisely what it is, but I am not convinced that it can be cured."

"You say that because you're in a despondent mood," said Philip. "Quite naturally," he added, with determined tolerance. Mola's defeatism was beginning to exert an oppressive effect on him. "But you mustn't look entirely on the black side——"

"There is a better side, you think?"

"Well, since you ask, yes, I do." A certain resentment at Mola's lack of recognition of his own sacrifice found expression. "If the whole truth had come out——" He stopped, despising himself for his words. Whatever service he had rendered Mola could only be debased by reminding him of it.

"The truth? About the drugs you mean?"

"Yes."

"That is so," admitted Mola. He asked, without emotion, in the manner of one interested to know the answer to a puzzling question: "Why did you not tell them? It would have been so much simpler for you. Why did you not do as they wished?"

The direct question threw Philip into confusion. He did not feel like going into his reasons with Mola. He tried to pass it off lightly. "Sometimes," he said, "I ask myself."

Through the corner of his eye, Philip saw Mola turn his head and regard him speculatively. After a short silence, Mola said, in a perplexed voice: "Even after so long in this country, I find the behaviour of the English is difficult for me to understand."

"There's nothing very weird about it," said Philip. "I was in charge of the case and I felt myself responsible."

"Oh no—you misunderstand me. I find your reason for

that quite simple. It is a question of honour. We in our country are very familiar with questions of honour. No, what was so surprising to me was that you should make a joke of it."

"I think," said Philip, "that it was because I was embarrassed."

"I see." Mola seemed to be making a mental note of this phenomenon. "I see—I must remember that."

## *Chapter Four*

FARTOWN MANOR HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN BUILT, at the beginning of the century, as a private nursing home for conditions of a nature which was never openly specified. It had served as a depository to which families in easy financial circumstances could consign relatives guilty of embarrassing or unpredictable behaviour. The accommodation was comfortable, the supervision strict, and the discretion absolute. No treatment was either given or expected. In those early days the management had set itself out to be exclusive—it insisted that candidates for admission should be not only secure financially but also of genteel society and completely free from dangerous or destructive tendencies. Most of the patients were either senile or alcoholic.

After some initial prosperity it had, like so many other praiseworthy enterprises, gradually succumbed to changing social conditions. The rise in the price of spirits, marching hand-in-hand with the impoverishment of the class for which the Home catered, dealt Fartown Manor a series of blows from which it never recovered. The management, in a desperate attempt to stave off bankruptcy, adopted a fatal expedient. They debased the standards of entry. The results of this became apparent in the late nineteen-thirties

when a particularly gruesome murder occurred in one of the more secluded quarters of the grounds. Amid some public outcry, the culprit was transferred to Broadmoor and the company finally wrote off its investment by selling to the local authority at a heavy loss. From then on, with considerably increased staff and safeguards, it had survived as an auxiliary mental institution under first the County Council and then the National Health Service. Under both these régimes it had remained an economic problem. The buildings, though imposing, were rambling and awkward to manage and maintain. The park was mainly rolling woodland which not only facilitated but almost invited escape. The situation was remote, and staff of all grades were hard to find. Worst of all, the relatives of the patients complained bitterly of this inaccessibility on visiting days. It was all very well, they wrote savagely to the local newspapers, for those who had cars. Gradually it was found more convenient to select patients for the hospital from those so fortunately placed. The bare, monastic rooms became filled with broken-down doctors, widows of Indian Army officers unable to adjust themselves to European conditions of life, clergymen who had become mental casualties in the struggle against Communism and the television set. Distressed gentility, after fifty years, had recaptured this one small fortress.

Of course, there were certain changes. The food was not what it was, and the service was distinctly offhand, but this could be explained as a reflection of conditions in the country as a whole. A more serious complaint centred around the psychiatrists, who were not content to leave well alone but insisted on making abortive but tiresome attempts at treatment. Quietly demented old people were dragged from their peaceful delusions into a world of remedial exercises and basket-work. Mutinously, they

bent their creaking knees and trapped their palsied fingers in the bars of the looms. But after all, they reminded themselves, it was free. One could not expect too much.

With some difficulty, Philip managed to find the main entrance. Fartown Manor did not believe in advertising its identity. The high iron gates, spiked at the top, might have barred the entrance to the private park of a wealthy recluse, the lodge might have housed his gamekeeper. But it was not quite the same, for the gates appeared to have no mechanism by which they could be opened, and the person who came out of the lodge door was a man of imposing physique in a dark blue uniform.

It seemed he was expecting them. After assuring himself of Philip's identity he retired into the lodge and pressed a button. Eerily, the gate swung open and Philip drove through. He drove for about half a mile up a gravel road with rows of damp, dripping shrubs on either side, before he reached the hospital. He told himself that in the daylight this was probably a very pleasant place. The hall, though undistinguished architecturally, was built in mellowed stone and had ivy climbing up its walls—and then there was the park. At the moment, however, on a pitch-dark winter night with rain in the air, the impression it gave was not of the best. The park was a sinister black wilderness, the façade of the building, unrelieved by lights, loomed over them like a menacing shadow.

Philip went up to the main door and rang the bell. There was some delay. Then he heard footsteps along a corridor and the sound of a key turning in the lock. The door opened, to disclose a portly middle-aged woman in a nurse's uniform.

"Mr. Selwood?"

"Yes. How do you do." They shook hands. The woman said: "I'm Sister Longworth. Is that our patient in the car?"

"Yes. That's Dr. Mola." He added apologetically, the anxious parent with the new boy: "I'm afraid he's a little morose at the moment—he's rather upset."

"Naturally. Naturally. We're used to that," said Sister Longworth, with a callous joviality that any housemaster would have envied. "Bring him in, would you, and I'll show you into the consulting-room."

Philip went to the car and opened the near-side door. Mola sat there like a man asleep.

"Wake up," said Philip, with forced cheerfulness. "We're here."

Mola stirred himself and climbed stiffly out of the car. His hat was over his eyes and he pulled his coat collar up as if to conceal his face from some imaginary onlookers. Together they went into the hall. Sister Longworth locked the door behind them and led them up a side passage into a room furnished as an office. There was an examination couch against one wall.

"Dr. Galbraith will be down very shortly," she said.

They sat down. Mola put his hat on the desk and then, with his overcoat still tightly buttoned around him, took up the hunched, apathetic posture which he had assumed in the car. He seemed hardly conscious of Philip's presence. Philip looked at him and knew that conversation between them now was as hopeless as if they were separated by a wall of glass. There was no means of contact.

It was a relief when the door opened and Dr. Galbraith came in. Philip had somehow pictured him as a man of middle age, but in fact he appeared to be hardly older than Philip himself. He was tall and lanky with bushy black eyebrows and a stoop; his suit fitted badly and gave the impression of having been hastily chosen off the peg in a multiple store. In spite of his lack of distinction, he was completely self-assured. He introduced himself in a soft, slow

voice with a slight but easily distinguishable Scottish accent.

"I'm senior registrar to Dr. de Groot," he explained. "Dr. de Groot's the head of the unit here."

Philip smiled and introduced himself in his turn. Mola said nothing, and when the psychiatrist spoke to him, he merely grunted in reply. Galbraith's only reaction to this display of rudeness was a slow nod of comprehension. He took out a case and offered cigarettes. Mola shook his head. Philip took one and Galbraith lit it for him.

"What about yourself?" Philip asked.

"I don't smoke." Galbraith returned the case to his pocket. Presumably, thought Philip with amusement, this was one of his 'props', the tools of his trade, comparable to stethoscope or scalpel. Was it in the training, he wondered—"Stage 1, put the patient at his ease, offer him a cigarette. Be friendly and gain his confidence. Then, as he smokes, watch him. Does he pull at it quickly and nervously? Does he lick his lips to moisten them? Are his fingers stained with nicotine . . .?"

Galbraith felt in one of the drawers of the desk and produced his second piece of apparatus. It was a long printed form. He began to fill in part of it himself in an expert, automatic fashion. As he did so, he went on speaking to Mola.

"I gather, Dr. Mola, that you've agreed to come in under us for a while as a voluntary patient. Perhaps I ought to make it clear to you exactly what that involves." In a rather bored voice he gave a short explanation of the relevant clauses in the Lunacy Act. When he had finished, he blotted the form and handed it to Mola.

"If you'd just read through it . . . then sign in the places indicated." As Mola began to read, he put in hastily: "Of course, as far as you're concerned, it's mostly pure red tape, but you know how things are nowadays." He turned to Philip. "You'd be surprised at the amount of

paper work in a place like this. It's enough to drive you off your head."

"I expect so."

"Turning us into clerrks, that's what they're doing," Galbraith complained, his accent rendered more pronounced by resentment. "But there you are—that's the Serrvice for you."

Mola signed the form and handed it back. Galbraith scrutinised it carefully—his contempt for forms did not extend so far as to encourage carelessness about their completion—and put it away safely in his breast pocket. There was a short silence. Then he darted a furtive glance at his watch and frowned. In a slightly exasperated tone of voice he began an aimless conversation about the weather and the state of the roads. He appeared to be waiting for something. After a while there was a knock on the door and Sister returned.

"I wonder if you could spare me Dr. Mola for a few minutes," she said to Galbraith. "There are one or two matters I'd like to explain to him."

"By all means," said Galbraith readily. "We were only chatting." He gave Philip a significant glance. "Perhaps you'd like me to show you the hospital."

When they were out of the room, Galbraith said: "Don't worry. I'm not going to show you round. That was just a pretext. Unfortunately that fool of a woman was late, which made it a bit awkward. Still, I don't suppose he noticed. You see," he explained, "I didn't want him to feel that you and I were talking about him behind his back. They're often very touchy about things of that sort."

He led Philip through the main hall, a great well in the centre of the building with galleries on either side rising up to a dome at the apex. It was lighted by a few dim electric bulbs and was deathly quiet—the sound of their heels on the



parquet floor rang out like shots from a rifle. Philip was used to the hush of a great building asleep, but this was something entirely different, as if all life had ceased. They might have been walking in a vault.

"After nine o'clock," explained Galbraith, "we lock them away in the wings. It makes the place seem a bit dead."

They moved out of the hall along another corridor. Here a sweet, sickly odour filled the air, increasing to its peak as they passed a door labelled 'Dispensary'. It was vaguely familiar to Philip. He had smelt it once or twice before, though never in such nauseating intensity.

"What's the smell?" he asked.

"Smell?" Galbraith looked puzzled. Then comprehension came to him. "Oh, you mean the paraldehyde? I don't notice it any more. We use enormous amounts of it as a sedative. Wonderful stuff for anybody who's noisy or excitable—puts them out like a light. And safe as houses. Knocks the barbiturates into a cocked hat, in my opinion." He opened a door and led Philip into a typical residents' sitting-room—two arm-chairs and a settee, all threadbare, and one with broken springs; a cheap oak sideboard covered with an untidy mess of envelopes, journals, and admission slips; half a cup of coffee, stone-cold, on the mantelpiece; beer stains on the carpet; a gas-fire with half its mantles missing and the remainder lurching dangerously sideways. Philip sat down in one of the arm-chairs.

"And talking of barbiturates, perhaps you could give me some more details about our unfortunate friend."

Philip told the story again. This time he told everything, including Elizabeth and the prison camp. Galbraith listened attentively throughout, occasionally breaking in to ask a question. When Philip had finished, he said: "Thank you very much. That's most helpful. I shall go over it all with him, of course; it will be significant to compare his version

with yours. You'd be surprised," he said, with a touch of humour, "how different it will be."

"I don't think he should be much trouble to you," said Philip. "He's genuinely anxious to get well. I'm afraid you've seen him at his worst this evening. He's usually extremely polite."

"Oh, that's nothing." Galbraith smiled at the idea that he could ever be offended by the behaviour of a patient. It occurred to Philip that a psychiatrist was in the happy position of being able to develop a special sort of thick skin, founded on the assumption that the personal reactions of others were merely symptoms of disorders within themselves. It was never considered that they might be a reflection on the behaviour of the psychiatrist himself.

"Will he be in here long?" asked Philip.

"I shouldn't think so. He should get straightened out in a month or two and be discharged. Mind you," he added, "it's impossible to say how long it will last. Once he gets under stress again . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

"What treatment will you give him?"

"That depends on old de Groot." Galbraith adopted the half-affectionate, half-contemptuous tone which was common among registrars when discussing their chiefs. "He may get interested. If he does, there'll be a lot of high-falutin talk about repressed aggression and behaviour patterns. He might even try psychotherapy for a few weeks until he gets bored with it." He smiled indulgently; the child must have its toys. "But I expect we shall end up by hitching him on to the mains."

"You'll—what?"

"Electro-convulsive therapy," elucidated Galbraith amiably. "You must have heard of it. You put a few thousand volts across their skull to stir up the old grey matter. It cheers them up no end, but don't ask me why."

With a flash of candour, he said: "Between you and me, it's the only treatment we've got worth a damn, and we haven't the foggiest notion how it works."

Galbraith got up and led the way back to the consulting-room. As they walked, he said: "So you're with Benson-Gray?"

"I was," replied Philip shortly. "I resigned today."

The Scot raised his bushy eyebrows. "Anything to do with this?"

"In a way. It's a long story."

"Uh-huh." Galbraith did not pursue the matter. He said conversationally: "It's a tough game. I started off in general medicine myself, but I could see there was no future in it. So I came into this." He added, not proudly, but as one explaining a point. "I shall be a consultant in a couple of years."

Philip was slightly exasperated by his knowingness, his dreary prudence. "But do you like it?" he asked.

Galbraith gave him a sardonic glance. "The hours are good," he said.

They were back at the door of the consulting-room. Galbraith opened the door and then moved forward quickly—as if he had noticed something disturbing. As Philip came through behind him he saw that Mola was still sitting in the same chair where they had left him. His coat was still on, his head bowed, his hat over his eyes, but there was something different about his attitude—it was more crumpled, more relaxed. Sister was nowhere to be seen.

Galbraith bent over him and felt his pulse. Then he tilted back Mola's head, lifted an eyelid and touched the cornea with his finger-nail. He looked back at Philip with some relief.

"Flat out," he said. "But his pulse is good. He hasn't knocked himself off." He added malevolently: "Not that

it's any credit to Sister that he didn't. I'll murder that stupid old-bitch one of these days."

He went through Mola's pockets and took out a small bottle. It was not completely empty. "Is this the stuff he takes?" he asked Philip.

"Yes."

"It's a new one on me," said Galbraith. He unstopped the bottle, dipped his finger-end in the liquid and then licked it. The black eyebrows went up. "Christ!" he said.

"What is it like?"

"Try it yourself."

Philip tasted a drop in the same way. Even the slightest taste of it was dreadfully bitter and astringent.

Galbraith shook his head. "He must have wanted it awful bad." He regarded Mola's unconscious body with an interest purely clinical. "Make the most of it, boy," he said. "It's the last you'll get for some time."

There was the sound of footsteps in the corridor. Sister came through the door carrying a glass of water and two aspirins. As she saw Mola she gave a cry of alarm.

"It's all right," said Galbraith sardonically, "he's not dead. But I think he's adopted more radical measures for his headache."

"Oh, Doctor, I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't have left him, but he seemed so normal, apart from his neuralgia he said he had——"

"Neuralgia, was it?" Galbraith turned to Philip. "As you see, we live with lies all the time. It's almost a crime to believe what a man tells you." He laughed shortly but without bitterness, proud of the capacity of his race for making the best of a bad job. "But that's the work." He said to Sister: "Perhaps you'd see that Dr. Mola gets up to the ward. There's one thing—he won't need any paraldehyde tonight. I'll show Mr. Selwood out myself."

Before they parted at the door, Galbraith said: "Do you want us to notify you about how he goes on?"

Philip hesitated and then said: "No."

"He hasn't any relatives?"

"Not that I know of."

"It's as you like, of course. I just thought—if you were a friend of his . . ."

"Listen!" cried Philip. It was as if he was speaking not just to Galbraith but to the whole world. "He isn't my friend—he's just a chap who worked with me. I helped him because nobody else would. Does that mean I have to carry him on my back for the rest of my life?"

Without waiting for Galbraith to answer, without even looking to see the expression on his face, Philip ran down the steps to his car. He drove away, crashing the gears in his agitation, and tore down the drive as if something were pursuing him with the intention of dragging him back to the obligation he feared. It was not until he was several miles away from the hospital that he felt safe to relax his speed.

It seemed a long drive back in the dark. It was after eleven o'clock when he arrived home, but he noticed that there were still lights in the house. This did not surprise him—it was one of Bella's idiosyncrasies that she liked to go to bed late and get up late. She would probably be in the kitchen, doing some job. Then, when he arrived, they would talk for a while before retiring.

He garaged the car and went into the house by the back door. Bella stood there waiting for him. He could tell at once that something had happened.

"You've been a long time," she said.

"Yes." He intended to leave it at that. Technically, she had no right to inquire after his movements. On the other

hand, his movements were practically the only news in her life—it would be small-minded to stand on his dignity. “I had to give a friend a lift,” he said lamely.

Bella nodded, accepting this for want of anything better. “Miss Pamela rang up.”

“She did?” He could not conceal his astonishment. It was hard to think of a more unlikely occurrence.

“Yes. She wanted to talk to you, but of course,” said Bella reproachfully, “I didn’t know where you’d gone. I couldn’t even give her anywhere to ring except the hospital, and you weren’t there——”

“What did she want?” interrupted Philip.

“It’s her father.” There was something familiar in Bella’s manner. It was not exactly satisfaction, but something approaching that, a gratified sense of participating in dramatic events, of imparting news of disaster. “He’s had a heart attack. She wants you to go over and see him tomorrow morning.”

## *Chapter Five*

PHILIP WAS REMINDED of the first time he had ever visited the Benson-Grays. The big house, with its well-kept lawns, its orchards and kitchen gardens, its stables and outbuildings, was something more grand than he was accustomed to, and it had made him feel awkward and ill at ease. As his visits had become more frequent, he had gradually come to take this grandeur for granted—ultimately he had almost reached the stage of accepting Sir Arthur’s invitation to treat it as his own home. Now, as Philip got out of his car and walked up to the front door, he found himself back at his starting point, solitary, nervous, uncertain of his welcome. Recently he had been in the habit of walking

straight through the front door without waiting to be announced, but today it would have seemed an impertinence. He rang the bell and waited.

He was shown into the drawing-room to wait for Pamela. There was no fire and the room was cold, in spite of the thin gleam of winter sunshine which came through the windows. The furniture, the pictures, the chintz-covered sofa on which he and Pamela had sat together so often, seemed detached and unfriendly, as if they no longer recognised him. He found himself sitting on the edge of his chair.

Presently the door opened and Pamela came in. He jumped up, looking at her anxiously for the same signs of stony indifference which his imagination had read into the inanimate contents of the house. He would not have been surprised to see, not a new Pamela so much as an old one, the Pamela he had first noticed across the length of this same room at a cocktail party some twelve months ago—elegant, thoughtful, aloof, utterly unconcerned with his existence. But when he saw her he realised with relief that he had been indulging in morbid fancies. She was the Pamela he knew so well—and still loved.

Nevertheless, her manner was constrained and shy, as if she also lacked confidence in the warmth of her reception. She stopped at some distance away from him and asked formally: "I hope you didn't mind coming?"

"Of course not." He said uncertainly: "Does he really want to see me?"

"Very much, I think. He asked for you several times."

"I don't quite understand," said Philip in perplexity. "I should have thought——" He stopped. It would be tactless to reopen old issues, but he was anxious not to be taken unawares. "Did he say why?"

"No."

He could see that he would get no enlightenment from

Pamela, that she also was in the dark about this summons. He asked: "How is he?"

"Not too bad at the moment. He had a pretty dreadful night. He was in a lot of pain. Then he had some morphia, which settled him. When he woke up, the pain had gone."

"Who's looking after him?"

"Hardwick."

"Well, you couldn't do much better. He's a gloomy little devil, but he knows his stuff. No humbug about him. What does he say it is?"

"Coronary thrombosis."

Philip nodded. "I rather guessed it might be that."

Her voice was deliberately, almost unnaturally, matter-of-fact. Only the pallor of her face, the restless brightness of her eyes, betrayed the strain she was suffering. "It seems he's come out of the first attack. Hardwick's giving him some injections to try to prevent him having another. Does that sound right?"

"Yes," said Philip. "That's the usual thing."

Looking away from him, she asked: "What do you suppose his chances are?" Before he could reply, she added: "Or is that a silly question?"

"Well, I can't give you much of an answer, I'm afraid," said Philip. "I'm no physician. But I should say that anything Hardwick tells you is liable to be right."

"He didn't sound too pessimistic."

"Then that's probably good. He has a reputation for looking on the black side." He paused, gathering up his resolution. There was a particular question which must be asked, though all his natural impulses were to shirk it. "Did Hardwick say anything about what might have brought the attack on?"

"Well," said Pamela reluctantly, "he did mention the meeting. I gather Father got a bit worked up."



"Things were going badly?"

"So I believe." She shrugged it off. "But that's neither here nor there. . . ."

There was a short silence. Then Philip said: "Do you blame me for this?"

With a certain impatience she replied: "What rubbish! Of course I don't."

"All the same, I feel——" He broke off, overcome by the difficulty of expressing his aching sense of betrayal. "You must know what I feel."

"You couldn't foresee this."

"No," he admitted. "But I let him down. Whatever my motives, I let him down. He wanted to be my friend. I was proud that he liked me. I admired and respected him. But when it came to the point, I left him on his own. And when I ask myself why, it isn't very clear. Mola said it was a matter of honour. But loyalty to your friends—that's a matter of honour too."

"You thought it was right at the time," she said. "Surely that's good enough. A heart attack doesn't turn right into wrong."

"No, I suppose not," he said dubiously. There seemed nothing more to say. He asked: "Shall I go up now?"

It was, as might have been expected, a model sick-room. The bed was freshly made, a fire burned in the grate. No medicines were to be seen. There were a few flowers, enough to brighten and perfume the air, but not enough to cloy. Expert, professional hands had been at work, creating an atmosphere at once cheerful and soothing. There was no pathetic, frightened attempt to conceal illness. It was accepted, managed, dealt with. In the conventional phrase, everything possible was being done.

Everything possible . . . Because, after all, nobody could

do the impossible. In the war against disease and death, success was never more than temporary—the last battle always went to the enemy. One came, with experience, to recognise when the time had come for the ultimate, inevitable defeat. It was revealed in a host of small signs—a look in the eye, a drooping of the lower jaw, a way of breathing, an indefinable change in the colour and texture of the skin. Philip looked at the bed, and then turned away in embarrassment, as if he had been caught spying on some intensely personal secret. Sir Arthur was a dying man.

He wondered if the old man knew. Philip remembered the times when, together, they had done their round of the wards—and, now and then, seeing those same indications, they had passed, with a hardly perceptible shrug, to the next bed. Could Sir Arthur look in the mirror now and see death written in his own face? Perhaps not. At such times a merciful self-deception tended to obscure the clearest minds.

“Hello, Philip.” Sir Arthur made an obvious effort, pulled himself together and smiled. Death was pushed a little further into the background. He tried to adopt a normal social manner. “Nice of you to come.”

“I was sorry to hear you were ill,” said Philip awkwardly, sitting down in the chair which was indicated to him.

“Yes. This blessed heart of mine. Still, Hardwick seems to have it well under control. He says it may be a coronary—on the other hand it may be just spasm.”

Philip nodded. Could Sir Arthur possibly believe this stuff about spasm? It was such a very old tale for soothing the patient’s anxiety. But it was necessary to play it. “I suppose the fact that it passed off so completely would indicate spasm,” he said encouragingly.

Sir Arthur made a tiny grimace which might have meant anything. “Possibly,” he said.

He picked up a cigarette-box from the bedside-table and handed it to Philip. "Do have one," he said, "though I'm afraid I'm not permitted to join you."

Philip declined. The sight of that bony arm stretching out of the sleeves of the pyjama jacket was particularly upsetting. It had never occurred to him to visualise Benson-Gray under such circumstances as these. A sick person is always at a disadvantage, and Sir Arthur had spent his life avoiding appearing at a disadvantage. There is a barrier between the doctor and his patient, the lawyer and his client, the banker and the borrower of money—the barrier between weakness and strength. Always Sir Arthur had been on the right side, rich, powerful, immaculate, self-possessed, unassailable. Now he was an invalid, a man to be patronised and deceived for his own good. He had crossed a frontier and left a whole world behind.

"Of course," he said, "this is hardly surprising to me. I've always had trouble with my heart, you know. Not of this sort, naturally. But I've had to be careful. I think sometimes people thought I was putting it on," he said reflectively, "—a bit of an old hypochondriac. They suspected that I stayed away when it was convenient."

"Oh, I don't think so," protested Philip.

"Oh yes . . ."

Sir Arthur rambled on. He spoke in a loose, disjointed, reflective way, occasionally diverging from the subject, as some new idea suggested itself to his mind. Coming from a man whose every word and act was directed towards some purpose, even though that purpose was not always at first sight discernible, this aimless conversation showed even more clearly than his appearance the advancing disintegration of his personality.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, moving off once more at a tangent, "very glad. I always thought of you as one of

the family. These other chaps who come to see me—professional colleagues—that's another matter. You know what I mean?"

"Yes," said Philip unhappily. The old man was heaping coals of fire on his head. He felt the desperate need to make his peace, to speak about his behaviour at the committee of inquiry, and, if not to defend it, at least to apologise for it. He opened his mouth to speak, but he was forestalled.

"I think," said Sir Arthur in a judicial fashion, as if speaking of someone else, "I'm going to die."

"Oh no!" protested Philip. "Why, Hardwick said . . ."

"You were wondering whether I believed that rubbish about spasm, weren't you?" Sir Arthur smiled wryly. "Do you know, for a while I almost did. It's amazing what you can believe when you want to. Then I saw the look on your face and that was enough." He looked up at the ceiling. His face carried no sign of fear. He was taking it well, a gentleman to the last. "I've had a better run than I had a right to expect—many stronger men have gone sooner. I was always in poor health even as a boy. The clever, sickly little swot who won all the prizes. Naturally, I wasn't happy. I didn't want the prizes; I wanted to be popular. But afterwards, different things mattered—I was a success. Health only really makes a difference when you're young and when you're old. In between, so long as you can manage your work, it's not important." He went on: "Everyone makes the same mistake about the old—everyone, that is, except a few people, like Isherwood, who really think about such matters. People think the old are strong because they're entrenched, they have influence and power, they've learnt how to do things. But power is a very elusive possession. The Isherwoods are watching you the whole time, looking for signs of decay. Soon you start watching yourself. Every morning you get up and try yourself out,

to see if you're as strong as the day before. There are signs—everybody knows them—loss of memory, poor concentration, living in the past. It's just a question of time before they come to you. It's like waiting for a letter through the post—with bad news. The worst possible, because nobody can help or comfort you. You've got the one disease that can't be cured and never will be. And it kills every time."

Sir Arthur paused. Philip felt that he should say something, but he could think of no suitable words. There was still no opening to introduce the main topic on his mind. He considered the possibility of quickly changing the subject, but once again he missed his opportunity.

"I remember," went on the old man reminiscently, "the time when Roderick died. It was hard to believe it. You expected him all the time to put a stop to it, to say, 'I can't be delayed like this. I have things to do.' It was a curious experience, to see him beaten by anything. You see, if I'm to tell the truth, I was always rather afraid of him. And when I looked at him that day, just before he died, I found I wasn't afraid of him any more. It was then that I knew that he was done for." He shook his head. "It was horrible."

The choice of adjective struck Philip as odd. The incident was pathetic, tragic perhaps—but there was nothing unpleasant or unnatural about it. He said: "Horrible?"

"Yes. You see, I was glad. It was a great relief to me. I hated myself for feeling like that—after all, he'd done everything for me—but I couldn't help it. I felt free. And it was as if I had to prove it . . ." He fell silent, thinking back over the events of years ago. "Did I ever tell you what happened after Roderick died?"

"No."

"Have you never heard anything—no rumours?"

"No—not really." Philip suddenly remembered a snatch

of conversation with Pamela on the day after the Fellowship. "Pamela once told me you were very worried for the first few months. She put it down to the fact that he was such a good friend of yours."

Sir Arthur nodded. "I suppose that was how it would appear. But Roderick didn't have any real friends. He had acquaintances and he had disciples—I was the chief disciple. I was content with that position, and Roderick knew it. It was an arrangement satisfactory to both of us. As he rose, he took me with him. And, for his part, he knew that, so far as I was concerned, he would always remain the boss." He sighed. "We went on like that almost to the end."

"Almost?"

"Yes. Not quite to the end, unfortunately. A few months before he died, Roderick had a slight stroke. Not a bad one, in fact the physical effects were hardly noticeable. It was kept quiet. He stayed in bed for a fortnight and gave it out that he had 'flu. He came back and went on working as usual, but to someone who knew him as well as I did it was apparent that his personality had changed. He became moody and suspicious. I had a feeling that he didn't trust me any more. He made vague remarks suggesting that I was waiting impatiently for him to be out of the way so that I could take over his position. He was beginning to lose his judgment."

"Did anybody else notice this?"

"Only one person so far as I know. That was Fr ; He spoke to me about it once or twice. We were both very worried. But it wasn't the sort of thing you could do anything about. We just had to wait and see. Then Roderick fell ill again."

"That was his last illness?"

"Yes. And, of course, we all knew it—everyone, that is, except Roderick himself. It was very awkward. He hung

on to the idea that he was coming back and insisted on keeping in touch, as he called it. This meant sending a bombardment of suggestions and instructions down to the hospital every day. Most of them didn't matter. But there was one that was very important. It concerned the chairmanship of the staff committee."

Sir Arthur leaned forward a little. His eyes were brighter, his face more animated, as if the memory of old intrigues had transfused new life into his exhausted frame. "Roderick was, of course, the chairman. But his illness rendered the chair vacant, at least for some considerable time and probably altogether. There was also some very important business coming up at that time. Roderick wrote to Froy saying that on account of illness he proposed to resign the chair. That was reasonable enough. It was presumed that I would take over. Then, a few days later, Roderick did an astonishing thing. He wrote another letter, making a very strong recommendation as to who should be his successor."

"Who was it?" asked Philip.

"Huxtable."

"Huxtable!"

"Yes! It was fantastic. But very awkward. Huxtable, as everybody knows, is a hopeless man on a committee—he's emotional and garrulous, and he has no sense of relevance. But he's a very popular man—he has a lot of friends. And also, technically, he's my senior. In addition to that, you have to remember what Roderick's position was at that time. For nearly twenty years the Royal had been doing exactly as he told it. Looking back, I still think as I did then. If the committee had seen that letter, they would have voted Huxtable into the chair."

"You say," said Philip incredulously, "if they had read the letter . . ."

With sombre emphasis, Sir Arthur said: "It was destroyed."

“By Froy?”

“Froy showed it me. We didn’t know what to do. It was obviously a most unbalanced action on Roderick’s part. All the same, if he had lived we could have done nothing—the letter would have had to go through. But he died before the meeting. As I told you at the beginning, it was a great relief to me.”

Philip said nothing. He felt that he needed time for consideration before taking an attitude on this story. Some moral judgment was presumably required, but he had lost confidence in his own capacity to make such judgments. Fortunately Sir Arthur did not seem to expect any comment. His main concern appeared to be the complete exposition of the situation in all its aspects.

“I took the chairmanship when it was offered to me and I had considerable success. After twenty years of Roderick everybody was delighted to have somebody who would listen to what they said. The University appointed me professor of surgery, and then six months later they appointed me to the presidency of the Cancer Research Commission. That was when I got my knighthood. So, as you see . . .” he said, summing up, “it made a great difference to me, that letter. And to a lot of other people. It was to everybody’s interests that I was appointed chairman of that committee, and Roderick had no motive in proposing Huxtable except personal spite. Poor fellow, he wasn’t himself in those last few months.”

And yet, thought Philip, you still find it necessary to explain, to excuse yourself. He asked: “But why were you so unhappy during those few months, if everything went so well?”

A look of pain passed over Sir Arthur’s face. “That’s something I’ve felt badly about ever since. Froy and I never thought of it at the time. But it gradually became apparent



to me that Huxtable knew. Rodcrick must have told him he had written the letter."

"Did Huxtable mention it?"

"Oh no—nothing so definite. But I could tell. There was something different about his manner. We'd been very good friends until that time. But afterwards——" he sighed. "Naturally, one could hardly expect . . ."

"Did he ever tell anyone else?"

"Oh no. But it was always there between us. At the inquiry, yesterday—I wondered if he remembered. It would have been natural if he'd thought that I was only getting what I deserved. But in fact he was one of the few who supported me."

"Surely," suggested Philip, "that would suggest that he no longer bore you any grudge?"

"Not necessarily." Sir Arthur explained without bitterness: "He always had an instinctive tendency to support the losing side."

Sir Arthur paused. Philip saw at last the opportunity he had waited for, to bring up his own part at that disastrous inquiry. He must be quick, before the old man veered off on another tack. In his haste, he blurted out the words awkwardly, in a series of staccato phrases.

"About all that, sir—I wanted to say—I can't tell you how sorry I am——"

Sir Arthur looked puzzled. He turned his mind back reluctantly from his own meditations. "About all what?"

"What I said at the inquiry. You see—I felt at the time——" He stopped short. What had he felt at the time? He could hardly remember. He went on miserably: "It's all very confused. At first I was sure I was doing right. Then, when Isherwood——"

"Ah yes—yes." Throughout Philip's disjointed attempts at explanation Sir Arthur had appeared quite at a loss, as if

unable to connect them in any way with himself. It was as if Philip's part in the affair had completely slipped out of his mind, leaving only the memory of another staff intrigue—one which, in this case, had ended not in victory but in disaster. It was only at the mention of Isherwood's name that his interest returned.

"Yes," he said, as if agreeing with some statement of Philip's, "he's a cold fellow, Isherwood. I can see him now at that inquiry, wondering whether it was the right time to go for me. Do you suppose it occurs to him that in fifteen or twenty years he'll be in my place and someone—someone like yourself perhaps—will be looking at him like that?"

"I shouldn't think so for a moment."

"No—you're right," agreed Sir Arthur. "He's a competent fellow, I don't deny it—but no imagination. Do you know what he called Roderick?—after he was dead, I need hardly say—an old *prima donna*." The old man laughed contemptuously. "He didn't know Roderick as I did." He leaned forward, his cheeks flushed with an excitement which was almost certainly deleterious to his physical condition. "Could he ever be what Roderick was? Could he have ever made himself noticed against a personality like that?" he demanded. "Not a chance." His excitement subsided. Once again, old memories took charge. His voice fell and he said, almost to himself: "I was afraid of Roderick—and I'm not ashamed to say so."

Philip sat in silence. He realised now that there was no need to say anything for Sir Arthur's sake, and no object in saying anything for his own. It was enough that he should simply be there. His desire to clear his conscience for the harm he had done to Sir Arthur would never be gratified, since Sir Arthur was no longer interested either in his conscience or in his part in the incident as a whole. Men grow

more self-centred with age and in the last hours of life their egoism becomes absolute. Dying is a full-time job and turns a man's thoughts irrevocably inwards—on innumerable occasions Philip had seen old friends and relatives, wives and lovers, children of the dying, turn away with the same expression of hurt bewilderment at their last-minute rejection. Sir Arthur no longer felt obligations towards the living. He had very little time to spare and was not unnaturally preoccupied with his own affairs, the affairs that had formed the mainspring of his life. It might have been more suitable, more dignified, if he had spoken of eternal things, instead of the trivial skirmishes for influence and position in the world he was soon about to leave. But, for this once in Sir Arthur's life, the appropriate attitude escaped him.

"A great man," he said, "a great man. He would have carried it off at that last meeting—somehow."

Philip said nothing. He had no point of contact with Sir Arthur in this last extremity. It was an ironical state of affairs. This, the first occasion on which he had felt emotionally at ease with the old man, was also the first occasion on which ordinary conversation had become impossible. Perhaps it was mere coincidence. Perhaps on the other hand there was some connection between the two, some lesson to be learned—if so, he could not put his finger on it. All he knew was that at last he could genuinely look on Sir Arthur in the same way as he had regarded his own father, with a mixture of respect, pity, protectiveness, love, and a constant irritation at the knowledge that no true understanding would ever exist between them. He believed, too, that a similar change had taken place in the other man. Sir Arthur had begun to look on him as a son—a person to be loved but not to be listened to.

The old man was silent. His eyes were closed and he

appeared to be hardly breathing. Philip felt guilty. The interview had probably overtired him.

Very gently, Philip said: "I think I should go now, sir."

"Yes." Sir Arthur made no attempt to detain him. All his strength seemed to have drained away. His fragility was alarming. "Come back and see me again tomorrow."

It was not a request but an instruction. With a member of the family one had a right to make such demands. Philip promised to do so, and then left.

That night Sir Arthur had a second coronary thrombosis, and then a third. He died in the small hours of the morning.

## *Chapter Six*

THERE HAD BEEN NO OPPORTUNITY to see Pamela, or even speak to her on the telephone, during the few days following her father's death. No sooner had the news broken than the house had been invaded by an assortment of aunts—fussy and sententious old women who had arrived from great distances, irresistibly attracted by the smell of death. They took over all the arrangements. Mourning was one of the few activities at which they felt themselves adept and experienced. They knew all about carriages, hearses, flowers, and notifications to the papers; they had views on the artistic possibilities of headstones, the pros and cons of cremation versus interment; they could deal on terms of business-like equality with the undertaker. By virtue of this technical proficiency they acquired a complete dominance over the household, and made Pamela, to all intents and purposes, their prisoner until the obsequies were completed. All Philip's attempts at communication were frus-

trated. He must wait, it was conveyed to him, until after the funeral.

The day of the funeral was bright and cold. As Philip waited at the cemetery he pulled his coat collar over his ears and stamped his feet on the flagstones. The cortège was late. He had a vision of Sir Arthur, always a punctual man, shuffling impatiently in his coffin at the delay. But he was impotent now. The aunts were in charge. Death was like war—it put power into the hands of the dreariest people.

The waiting crowd seethed, murmured, gathered into little groups as people recognised acquaintances. A young man in a cheap belted overcoat, wearing battered suède shoes, appeared at Philip's side.

"Taking their time," he observed.

Philip nodded in agreement. The young man looked poor, shabby, and not at all at his ease. His clothes were inappropriate. He was plainly one of those gregarious creatures who feel lost and unhappy unless they are talking to somebody. Philip wondered what he was doing at the funeral at all.

As if anticipating such a question, the young man said: "I'm from the *Evening Argus*."

"You're here to cover the funeral?"

"That's right. It'll be the usual business," he said despondently. "I shall sweat my guts out writing a couple of columns and they'll cut it down to a paragraph. Still—they can't kill you for trying, can they?"

"I suppose not."

"You'd wonder why they bother to send me, wouldn't you? Well, there's just a chance in a thousand that something peculiar might happen——"

"Such as what?"

"God knows. But if it did, they'd never forgive them-

selves for missing it. And they like the names of the various notabilities present. That's the sort of boring rubbish they *will* print. You couldn't tell me a few, could you?"

Philip obliged with a few names that he knew. The young man copied them down in a dispirited fashion, spelling most of the names incorrectly. As he was doing this, Huxtable came up.

"Hello, Selwood," he said, blinking nervously behind his glasses. "Haven't seen you recently." He gave the impression of having approached Philip with the intention of talking about some specific point. He glared at the journalist. "Friend of yours?"

The young man shook his head several times rapidly and blushed. He was really too sensitive, Philip thought, to be a success in his profession. "No—no——" he said. "Just——" Without bothering to finish his sentence he melted into the crowd.

"Queer sort of chap," said Huxtable curiously. Then, dismissing the young man from his mind, he said: "Damned tight, these stiff collars. Don't you think so?"

"I'm not wearing one."

"Sensible fellow. I wish I had the moral courage. I hate this funeral pomp myself. But Benson-Gray was a formal sort of chap. He'd have liked it." He looked appraisingly at Philip. "Aren't you engaged to his daughter or something?"

"Not exactly."

"Oh." Huxtable nodded thoughtfully, not apparently conscious of any indiscretion. "What are you planning to do now?"

"I don't know. I haven't any fixed plans. At one time I thought I might follow Jackson and go to Canada."

"A damned good idea," said Huxtable with enthusiasm. "If I were your age, I'd do the same. No future here." He

added rather sententiously: "There's nothing like being young. I don't suppose you believe that. No one realises it until they're old, and then it's too late. We just muck about, pretending as hard as we can that we're doing something important." He suddenly jerked his head contemptuously. "Look at that crew over there."

Philip looked. Withdrawn some distance from the other mourners, Isherwood, Froy, and Sir Oswald Pettiford stood together in converse. It was not necessary to listen to what they said. Their solemn, conspiratorial manner was enough to indicate what was going on. The preliminary steps were being taken. There was no time to lose; the pack could not remain for long without a leader. Already, with a hint, a promise, a bribe, a bargain, the succession was being arranged.

"Isherwood will get it," said Huxtable. "No doubt about that. And he'll get it early—he can't be more than forty-five. That's very important in itself."

"Why particularly?" asked Philip.

"You outlive the people who put you there," explained Huxtable. "You end up by being dependent on nobody—a very strong position. Isherwood wants to be another Roderick."

"Oh, surely not! Why, he says——"

"I don't care what he says. That's what he wants." Huxtable shrugged his shoulders. "And he can have it, as far as I'm concerned. I haven't got much longer to go anyway. I won't pretend," said Huxtable honestly, "that I like the man. But at least he's a doctor first and a politician afterwards. I can stand him better than those two other sanctimonious hypocrites."

Philip protested: "Surely Sir Oswald's fairly harmless."

"Wouldn't trust him an inch," said Huxtable decidedly. "You know he turned on Benson-Gray in the end?"

"No," said Philip, "I didn't know that."

"Yes. When he saw the way the wind was blowing. That fellow Langley from the Ministry scared the daylights out of him." Huxtable sighed. "I was sorry about that business."

"So was I."

Huxtable touched his arm as if to give comfort. "It was no responsibility of yours. None of us thought it was. You couldn't help what happened afterwards." Looking round at the crowd, he said: "It's really a wonderful turn-out, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Not like Roderick's, of course—we could hardly expect that. You should have seen them on that day, lining the streets, people from all classes, rich and poor. It was a wonderful sight."

"I should imagine so."

"Though, between you and me," said Huxtable confidentially, "Roderick was never my sort of chap. I preferred old Arthur myself—more human, if you see what I mean. And he did a lot of good for the Royal." He frowned unhappily. "Of recent years I never felt he liked me very much. We used to be very friendly once, but after Roderick died he changed quite suddenly. He always seemed to be on his guard somehow—I can't imagine why."

At last the head of the procession appeared. Hats were removed, heads bowed in reverence. The hearse drew up, the cars disgorged their contents, the coffin was taken out and carried into the crematorium. The crowd moved into the chapel, a small, practical, antiseptic-looking building which gave the impression of being merely an accessory to the series of combustion chambers which adjoined it. There was not enough room for everybody present. Philip was



interested to notice with what accuracy the people had instinctively arranged themselves in order of importance, from Sir Oswald and other members of the Board, who knelt in the second row of pews, just behind the relatives, down through other local notabilities, consultants from the hospital, personal friends and neighbours, the Matron and a few of the older Sisters. The Royal preserved its decorum and discipline to the last. It seemed somehow fitting to Philip that he should find himself, standing at the back, crushed between the journalist and a girl whom he vaguely recognised as one of the maids from the house. He was now a person of no significance, he had no further place in this world at all. It was expected of him that he should behave tactfully and remove himself from the scene as quickly and unobtrusively as possible. He was no longer a part of this particular struggle, this little whirlpool of life. For a moment he had been in the centre. Then with a sudden twist he had been flung outwards, whisked off to the periphery, and beyond. There was no return, even if he wished it. He must find another world, another struggle, of which he could make himself a part. Perhaps in Canada. . . But why, after all, be a part of any struggle? He wondered. It seemed a strange business. One fought one's way nearer to the centre of things, to a more and more vital part in the conflict, like a salmon battling its way up-river to breed, and by an instinct equally obscure. And then? Philip glanced at the coffin resting in an alcove at the side of the altar behind draped curtains ready for disposal when the time came. In the moment of attainment lay the beginning of inevitable dissolution, the final orgasm marked the point of descent into impotence and death. A sad and futile story, perhaps, a lost cause hardly worth fighting for—but there was a certain gallantry about it.

The short, tidy little service moved to its end. The

curtains were drawn and the coffin disappeared from view. Sir Arthur had moved into a new phase. From now on he would be absorbed into tradition. His canonisation would be a leisurcly, gradual process. A portrait in the board-room in his robes as Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons, an annual course of lectures or a scholarship carrying his name. Perhaps even a bust . . . There was no knowing at this stage.

Philip waited at the door of the chapel as the mourners filed out. He was determined to see Pamela before she left. Finally he saw her, flanked by aunts and attired discreetly in black. In accordance with the emotional discipline which had always formed the background of her life, she showed no sign of tears, but her face carried an expression of strain. She caught his eye and came up to him. When they stood face to face it suddenly occurred to him that he had no idea at all what to say.

She said: "Don't worry. You don't have to say anything appropriate." She touched his hand as if it were he who needed consolation. "It reminds me of when my mother died. I was at school at the time. For the first few days after I went back it was ghastly, as if I had some infectious disease. I embarrassed them so. Then they forgot to be sorry for me and everything was all right."

"You must hate all this."

"Yes," she agreed. "It's horrible. But I can't really feel it's anything to do with Father, fortunately. It's later, when things have quietened down, that I shall miss him."

"Shall I be able to help?"

"If you want to."

"Yes," he said, "I want to. Can I see you later?"

"Not today," she said. "Today belongs to the aunts. But all the rest is yours."

"Canada?"

“Or anywhere else—if you really want to go. But we’ll talk about that tomorrow.”

With a faint smile she left him. Philip walked down the drive towards the road where his car was parked. Whatever else was lost, that at least was strong and settled. Pamela was his, and all else seemed of minor importance. The Royal, which had dominated his life for the last six months, had now sunk into place as one incident in the cavalcade of his memories. Gradually his recollection of it would grow dimmer, until only a few of the most dramatic events would remain.

The Royal would forget him even more easily. There was no institution more indifferent to personal problems than a hospital. Where tragedy was part of the daily routine of life, even sickness and death among the staff had not the same power to shock as they had in the world outside. The hospital worked on, like some monstrous immortal beast, capable of replacing its members at the moment of their amputation. It was not possible to flatter yourself that your fate could have any significance to this collective organism. It had cast aside better men than you, and forgotten them. You could not impress it, or appeal to it, or horrify it. It had seen too much ever to be shocked. It could be dominated for a time by this person or that, but in due course death brought the tenancy to an end; the indispensable figurehead passed from the scene, and the hospital carried on, much the same as before.

As Philip passed out of the gates of the cemetery, he looked back. The cemetery was cold, deserted, depressing. He was almost the last to leave. But not quite the last. Two figures still remained talking in the doorway of the chapel. Sir Oswald was arranging with the vicar about a memorial service.



